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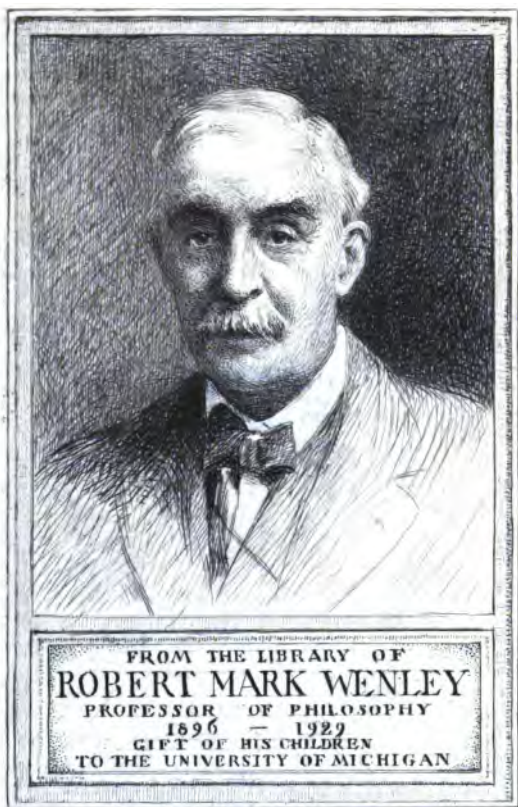
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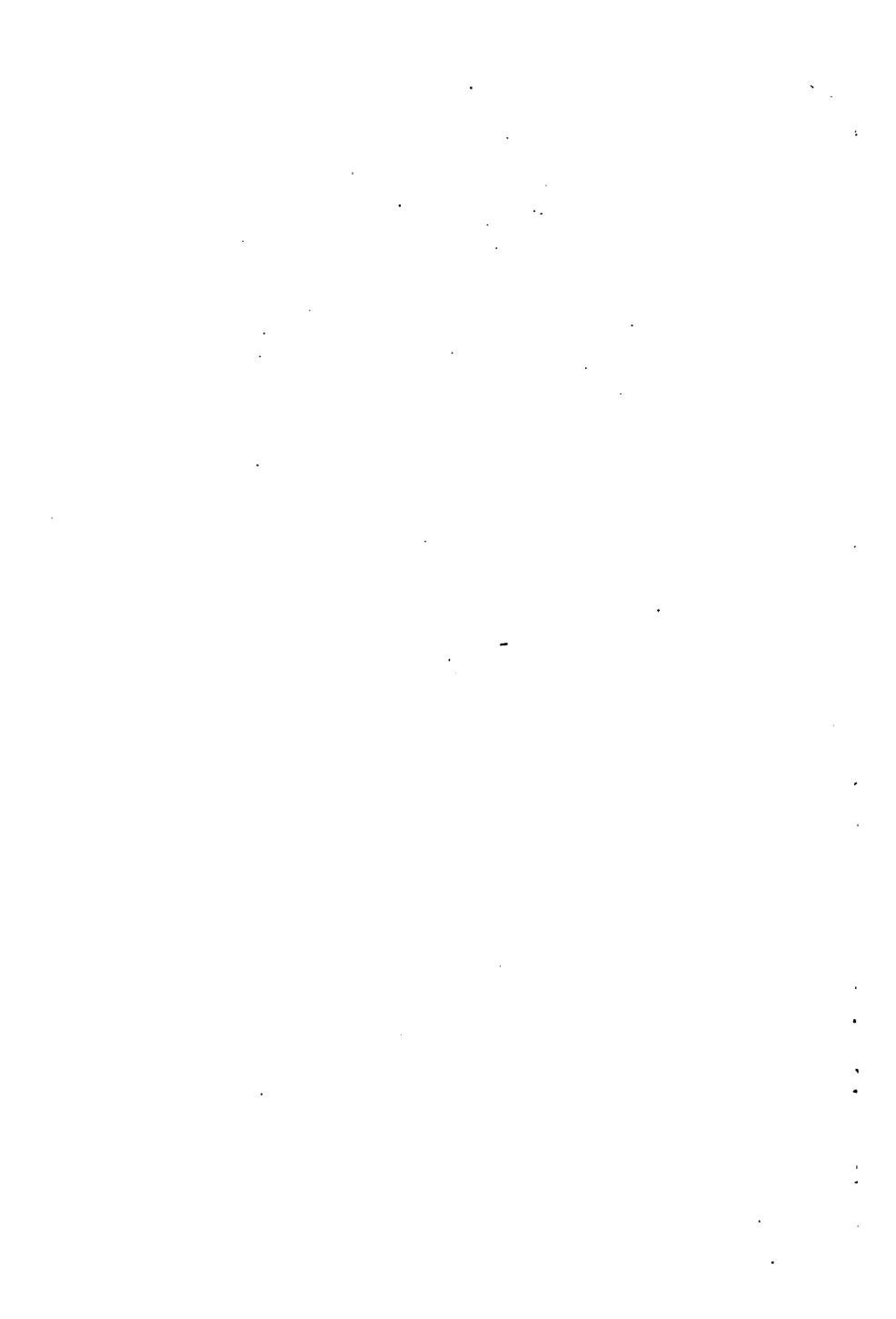
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THE BIBLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH WITH THE SANCTION AND
ASSISTANCE OF THE AUTHORS.

BY

PHILIP H. WICKSTEED, M.A.



THE BIBLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

BY
DR. H. OORT,

PROFESSOR OF HEBREW ANTIQUITIES AT LEIDEN,

AND

DR. I. HOOYKAAS,

PASTOR AT ROTTERDAM,

WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF

DR. A. KUENEN,

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY AT LEIDEN.

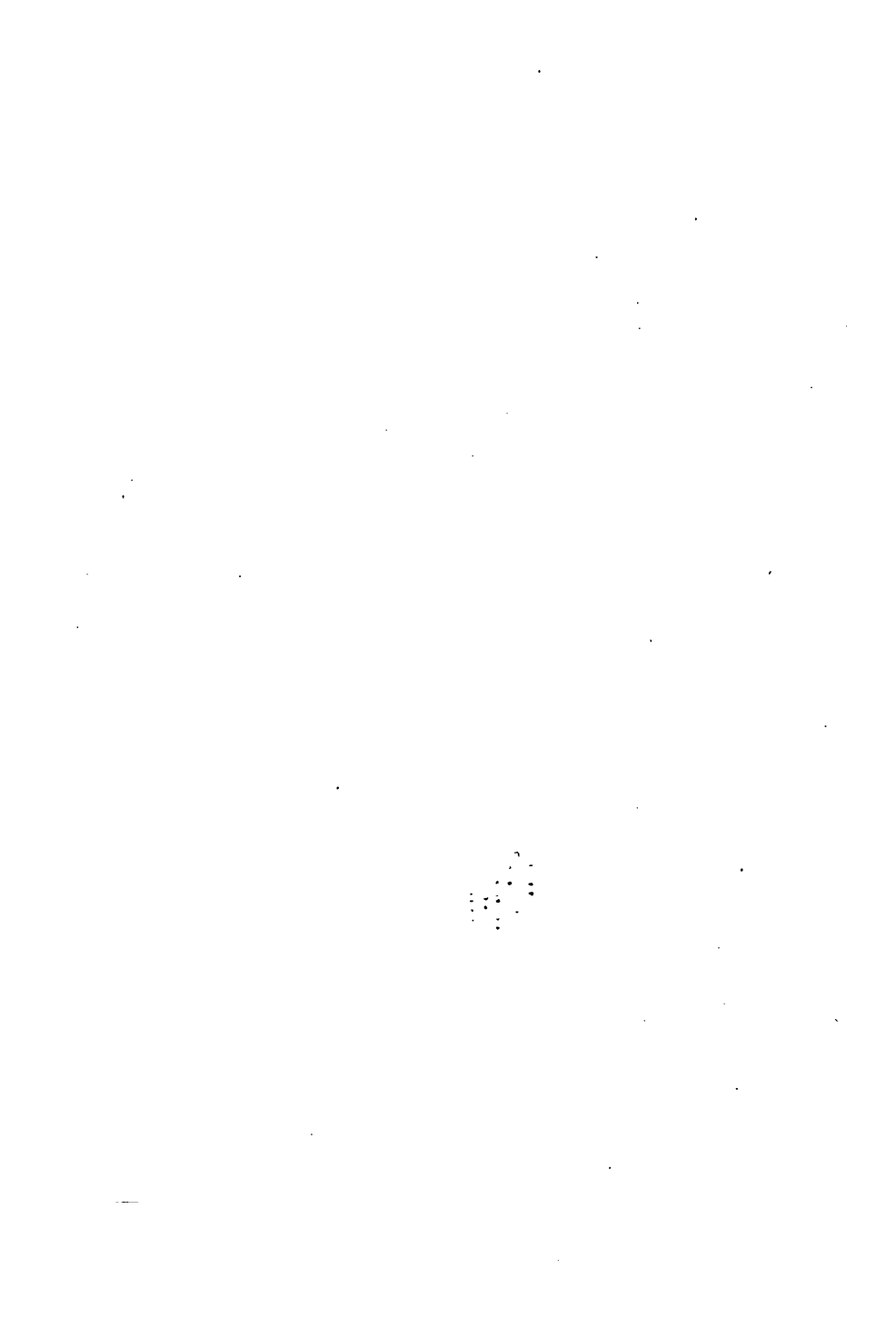
VOL. IV.

PREPARED BY DR. H. OORT.

Authorised Translation.

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BOOK IV.

FROM JOSIAH TO THE MACCABEES.

CHAPTER I.

JOSIAH'S DEFEAT AT MEGIDDO.

2 KINGS XXIII. 29—35;¹ JEREMIAH XI. 18—23.

WE have now reached the last period of the history of Israel's religion and national existence recorded in the Old Testament; and since it gives us the key to the comprehension of the age of Jesus and to some extent of modern Judaism also, its treatment is by no means the least important part of our task.

The first requisite for a clear insight into Judah's subsequent history is a distinct conception of the religious position held by the guiding spirits of the nation from the time of Josiah's reformation onwards. They believed that the fates of nations and of men did not depend upon the natural sequence and connection of events, following the laws of cause and effect, but were the immediate dispensations of Yahweh, who accorded his favour or displeasure to the virtue or the vice of men. For anyone to ask a blessing of Yahweh, therefore, involved his appealing to his own fidelity in the service of his god and to the uprightness of his life.

Hitherto, therefore, the prophets of the Mosaic school had been sparing in their promises to Judah, stained as

¹ 2 Chronicles xxxv. 20—xxxvi. 4.

she was by the worship of strange gods and images ; but now that the stain had been removed and Yahweh alone was worshipped in the land, they were certain of his help, and uttered words of lofty cheer without stint.

At first the event seemed to justify their confidence. The Scythians, who had inspired the Judæans with such terror,¹ inflicted no serious injuries upon the country. We can easily guess the reason, for the great road from the Euphrates to Egypt ran through the plain of Jezreel and on through Gaza, skirting the territory of Judah, but not crossing it, and leaving it, therefore, in comparative safety. The Scythians, accordingly, overran the former kingdom of the ten tribes, where they possibly left a record of their stay in the name of Scythopolis or Scythian-town, which was given to the ancient Bethshan,² after which they advanced along the sea-coast towards Egypt. King Psammetichus, who broke up the siege of Ashdod on their approach, succeeded in buying them off, upon which they returned by the way they had come, plundering a temple in the Philistine city of Askelon as they passed, and finally retired altogether. Judah was therefore spared. All this most likely took place soon after Josiah's reformation, and would naturally strengthen the confidence of the Judæan prophets very greatly. Was it not plain to see that Yahweh was protecting his people ?

The same view was taken by many inhabitants of the northern district also. Even before the fall of Samaria the worship of the bulls had been vigorously attacked, and now the sanctuary at Bethel was desecrated and the chapels of the *bamahs* laid waste. Moreover, all zealous Israelites dreaded the influence of the religions which the heathen colonists had brought with them,³ and felt a corresponding sympathy for the worship of Yahweh now established in Judah.

¹ Compare Vol. III., pp. 422 f.

² See Map V.

³ Compare Vol. III., p. 396.

The social condition of the country was also favourable to a closer union. The men of the North were too feeble to hope for national independence, especially since they had suffered so much from the Scythians, and they were therefore anxious to unite once more with their brethren in the South; while the Judæans, on their part, were ready to receive them with open arms. The points upon which they differed were no insuperable obstacle to their union, and Jeremiah might now exclaim to the dwellers in the North: ¹ "Repent, O children that have gone astray! For Yahweh's favour toward you has revived, and he remembers that he is your god. Ere long shall men cease to grieve because the ark of the covenant is gone; for all Jerusalem shall be called the throne of Yahweh, and all the heathen shall put away their evil deeds and shall come up to Sion to worship Yahweh."

According to Jeremiah, Judah had sinned as deeply as Israel, and had only repented in appearance; ² but the majority of the prophets were far from sharing his belief. Surely Judah was a pious nation, they thought, visibly protected by Yahweh! During the next few years the prophets who cherished these self-satisfied and confident thoughts had a great advantage over the man who still wailed for the people's sins and ever cried for repentance; for the years rolled prosperously by, Josiah sat upon the throne of his fathers in peace, the northern districts came more and more completely under his sway, peace and prosperity reigned unconfined. No wonder that the voice of the prophets of smooth things rose ever higher, and secured a more and more universal response.

We may judge of the sentiments entertained towards Josiah from the following song, which was, perhaps, composed in his honour. It is the seventy-second psalm, with the omission of the last two verses, which were added to

¹ Jeremiah iii. 12—18.

² Jeremiah iii. 6—11.

it when it was taken up into the collection of Psalms as the concluding hymn of the second book :—

O Yahweh ! teach the king to utter judgment,
Give insight to the monarch's son !
Let him judge thy people in equity,
Thine oppressed in wisdom and honour.
The mountains shall bring forth peace to the people,
So shall the hills by righteousness.
He shall maintain the right of the poor,
Shall rescue the children of the needy,
And shall bring the oppressor low.
They shall fear him as long as the sun shall shine,
As long as the moon exists, for ever !
He shall be like the rain on the pasture,
Like the shower that waters the earth.
In his days shall the righteous flourish,
And prosperity shall not fail as long as the moon
endures.

May he rule from sea to sea,
From Euphrates to the ends of the earth !
May his adversaries¹ bow before him ;
May his enemies lick the dust !
Let the kings of Tarshish and the isles bring presents,
Let the rulers of Sheba² offer him gifts !
May all the kings pay homage to him,
And all the heathen serve him,
For he rescues the poor who cry for help,
The afflicted whom there is none to succour ;
He pities the wretched and needy ;
He delivers the souls of the poor.
From injustice and violence he rescues them ;
In his sight their blood is precious.

¹ After an amended version.

² Compare Vol. III., p. 96.

Long may he live ! may they bring him gold from
Sheba,

May they pray for him always and bless him ever !
May corn abound in the land ;

• May the harvest wave on the hills like the forests
of Lebanon ;

May the people of the cities increase like the grass !
Let his name abide for ever

And extend as far as the sun shines !
Let men wish each other prosperity like his ;¹
Let all the nations call him blessed !

It is, indeed, quite possible that this song was composed in honour of some other king, or is a so-called Messianic psalm, that is to say, a psalm expressing a longing for Israel's ideal king, and celebrating his glory ; but in any case it expresses the feelings entertained towards Josiah by most of the leaders of the Mosaic school ; for "before him," in the judgment of the author of Kings,² "no king had equalled him in perfect obedience to Yahweh, according to all the law of Moses, nor did his like rise up after him."

But amidst all the rejoicings of priests and prophets, who vied with each other in praises of the king and people, and saw nothing but blessings in the future, one man at least was wholly dissatisfied with Judah's present condition, and that man was Jeremiah. Doubtless he, too, had rejoiced with all his heart when Josiah set about purifying Judah's religion from heathen stains, but this was by no means enough. To break down *bamahs*, to burn *asherahs*, to shatter *massebahs*, and to pollute the *tophet*, was

¹ Compare Genesis xii. 3 ; and Vol. I., p. 141.

² 2 Kings xxiii. 25.

well; but it fell far short of Yahweh's demands. What did He really care for all the sacrifices which his worshippers made to him? "To what purpose," cried the prophet, in Yahweh's name,¹ "do you burn up some of your sacrifices whole? Make a meal of them with an easy heart! For when I brought you out of Egypt I gave you no commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices. One only thing did I command you: To listen to my voice, that I might be your god, and you my people. But you have been rebellious, since you came out of Egypt until now. In vain have I sent my servants, the prophets, to warn you, for you would not hearken to their voice, but have done even yet more wickedly than your fathers. Therefore I will bring misery upon you and reject you."

The declaration that Yahweh attached no value to the distinction between the burnt offerings which were entirely consumed and the ordinary sacrifices, only a part of which was laid upon the altar, is extremely significant, and so is the slighting manner in which, as we have just seen, Jeremiah speaks of the ark of the covenant. Such words become all the more remarkable when uttered by the son of a priest. They show what supreme importance he attached to the claims of morality, and how completely he postponed everything else to that "love of Yahweh with all the heart" upon which Hilkiah's book of law had also insisted so powerfully.

His hearers, however, were anything but docile. Who so intolerant as those who are pious in their own eyes! The Judæans, after Josiah's reformation and still more after what they regarded as the visible proof of Yahweh's favour in the departure of the Scythians, were so taken up with themselves and so profoundly convinced that they were the chosen people, that a sharp reproof sounded quite sacrilegious in their

¹ Jeremiah vii. 21—23.

ears, and it was by no means safe to rebuke them openly. When Jeremiah did so he became the object of such bitter hatred that his very life was in danger.

This was the case before he left his native place of Anathoth. An attempt was made to close his mouth, and when that failed snares were laid for his life. As he himself expresses it, he was like a lamb or an ox that is led to the slaughter, for he knew not that his life was threatened; but he discovered the plot in time. "Yahweh revealed it to him," upon which he fled in all haste to Jerusalem, and there worked on in the same spirit as before. He was bitterly incensed against his fellow-townsmen for refusing to listen to Yahweh's word. Years afterwards, when he recorded the whole affair in writing, he could not refrain from adding these words, as he remembered what had taken place: "O Yahweh of war-hosts! thou righteous judge, who searchest the inmost parts and the very heart, let me behold the vengeance which thou wilt exact, for to thee have I made my complaint. Verily, says Yahweh, I will repay these men of Anathoth for their deeds; their young men shall fall by the sword; their sons and daughters shall perish with hunger; not a remnant shall be left when I chastise them in the year of vengeance."¹

We shall soon see that Jeremiah fared no better in Jerusalem than he had done in Anathoth. We cannot tell when he reached the capital; but thirteen years elapsed between Josiah's reformation and his defeat, so that, if we place the retreat of the Scythians about a year after the reformation, there are twelve years left during which the prophet must have reproached the people with their sins, threatened them with Yahweh's wrath, and called them to repentance and conversion, though the general prosperity seemed to prove that Yahweh was well pleased and the mass of the prophets

¹ Jeremiah xi. 18-23.

glorified Israel with one mouth. "Peace! peace! All danger is afar!" No wonder that Jeremiah himself sometimes went astray and doubted whether Yahweh gave a thought to Israel's doings; no wonder that, when all this light was suddenly changed to darkness, he cried in the depth of his pity for the humbled people:¹ "Alas! Lord Yahweh, thou hast deceived this people and Jerusalem! Thou hast deceived them! For thou didst tell them they should prosper, and now the sword smites them to the death."

Judah was indeed to be smitten to the death! Let us see what came to pass in the thirty-first year of Josiah's reign.

The Egyptian king Necho, who had succeeded Psammetichus, was bent upon war. His motive was that which usually actuates powerful princes, namely ambition. The opportunity seemed to have come for him to extend his dominions towards the Euphrates; for Nineveh, rescued a few years before by the appearance of the Scythians, was now besieged anew by the Medes and Babylonians, and not a single monarch in western Asia was in a position to resist the mighty ruler of Egypt. Should Necho's weapons prove victorious, Judah and the other countries round about the Dead Sea would infallibly fall a prey to him; but for the present the danger swept by them, and we find Necho encamped at Megiddo, in the plain of Jezreel, north of Judah, intent upon marching straight for the Euphrates, though whether he had taken the high road through Gaza or had transported his troops by sea we do not know.

Had Josiah listened to the dictates of prudence he would have awaited the issue of Necho's campaign, or at any rate would have made allies amongst his neighbours; but we are well enough acquainted with the disposition of the Judæans of the time to feel no surprise at their discarding such

¹ Jeremiah iv. 10.

prudent counsels. Megiddo was situated in the ancient territory of Israel, now subject to Josiah, and was therefore upon holy ground. Should Yahweh's people, purified as now it was and honouring its god according to the dictates of his law, suffer the uncircumcised to tread upon his heritage? Was it not certain that he, the Almighty, would sustain his people Israel? What faithful servant of his would care to count the foe! Yahweh would smite them before the face of his servants, and if they advanced to battle by a single way they would flee by seven.¹ Josiah, the anointed of Yahweh, was invincible. To arms, then, for Yahweh and Josiah!

The Chronicler tells us that Necho dissuaded the king of Judah from the war, saying that he meant him no harm, but that God had sent him against another kingdom whither he must hasten, and that it was against the will of God to delay him. Josiah, however, took no heed of the word of God declared by the mouth of Necho, and opposed the further advance of the Egyptian army.

The battle was fought at Megiddo, in the plain of Jezreel. Israel was defeated and Josiah himself was slain. This was the end of Judah's independence. Necho did not enter the land itself, for he had no time to waste in taking possession of so insignificant a territory, but he was safe in regarding himself as Judah's lord. Josiah's son Jehoahaz, whom Jeremiah calls Shallum,² was summoned by the people to mount his father's throne, but three months afterwards he presented himself at Riblah, in Syria, apparently at Necho's command. Thence he was sent in chains to Egypt, and his brother Eliakim or Jehoiakim was placed on the throne of Judah as the vassal of Necho, to whom he had to pay a heavy tribute.

Josiah's defeat and death were an overwhelming blow to Judah. From the height of prosperity, at which, in its pre-

¹ Deuteronomy xxviii. 7.

² Jeremiah xxii. 11.

sumption, it had feared no one and foreseen nothing but blessings, it was plunged into the depth of humiliation and slavery. It had also to bewail the beloved and still youthful monarch to whom it owed its regeneration; and Jeremiah, as the Chronicles inform us, made songs of lamentation for Josiah, and all the singers have sung of him "until this day."

No wonder! The terrible shock experienced by the Judæans was caused not only by the loss of prosperity and freedom, but by the impossibility of reconciling the event with the tenets of their faith. Josiah, the most devout of princes, slain! Judah, but now reformed in accordance with the law of Yahweh, lying in the grasp of the enemy! What could it mean? Why had Yahweh done these things?—The adherents of the heathen school cried out: Was it not Josiah that overturned the altars of Baal and abolished the service of the Queen of Heaven? The Mosiac school of course refused to accept this explanation, but were at a loss to find a better. Even Jeremiah, who had been so far from sharing the high-wrought expectations of the popular leaders, could not hold back the words, "O Yahweh, thou hast deceived this people in prophesying peace." What, then, must others have said! Even the staunchest believers felt their faith in Yahweh shaken.

CHAPTER II.

THE PREACHER OF REPENTANCE.

JEREMIAH XXIII. 9—40, XXVI., XVI. 1—9, XX. 7—18.

WE can trace the course of Judah's history, after Josiah's defeat, in the book of Kings; but while this work hardly gives us anything but the succession of events, the writings of the prophets who lived at the time initiate us

more or less completely into the position and the motives of the several parties, and the moral condition of the Judæans. The most abundant source of these indications is the book of Jeremiah's oracles; for in it this remarkable man, whose fate was so closely intertwined with that of his people, records his own utterances and experiences.

We have already spoken of him more than once, but must now dwell more expressly on his mission and his character.

Every page of his writings shows him as the preacher of repentance. The cry of "Woe!" was almost always on his lips. On certain occasions he showed his power as a comforter, but the burden of his cry is usually found in dire threats of famine, sword, and pestilence. And this went on for nearly half a century, in the midst alike of a prosperous and of a sorely-trying and deeply-suffering people. The prophet became so much accustomed to this gloomy view that he once distinctly said:¹ "True prophets of the elder time have always foretold misery; and should one proclaim a blessing, men must not hold him for a messenger of Yahweh before his word has been made good." To understand his own conception of his task we must pay especial attention to his onslaughts upon the prophets who foretold prosperity. The following is one of his discourses:²

My heart is broken, my bones tremble. I am like a drunken man, overcome with wine. It is because of Yahweh and his holy words; for the land is full of adulterers and is pining under its curse. Thus says Yahweh: Prophets and priests commit sacrilege together; in my very house I detect their wickedness. I will therefore bring misery on them in the year of their visitation. If the prophets of Samaria led my people astray, the prophets of Jerusalem do yet greater horrors; for they commit adultery, they lie, and confirm evil-doers in their impenitence. Wherefore, says Yahweh, I will

¹ Jeremiah xxviii. 8, 9.

² Jeremiah xxiii. 9—40.

feed them with wormwood and give them the water of galls to drink, for the prophets themselves are the source of the sacrilege which covers the land with guilt. Oh! give no heed to their words; for they lie, and utter the inventions of their own hearts, and not what I have revealed to them. To those who forsake Yahweh's word they cry: "You shall have peace;" and to him who follows his own devices, "No evil shall overtake you." But their words are false, for the storm of Yahweh's wrath is rising up to burst over you. These prophets I have not sent; and they know not what I purpose.—Am I a god of yesterday or the day before, says Yahweh, and not a god of primeval time? Could anyone hide from me, that I should not see him? Do I not fill both heaven and earth? Truly I hear these prophets who utter lies in my name and say: "I have dreamt. I have had a dream!" How long will they still find lies to tell? By their false dreams they make my name forgotten, as their fathers rejected it for that of Baal. Let the prophet who has had a dream tell it, and let him who receives my word report it faithfully! But what has chaff to do with wheat? Is not my word like a fire, asks Yahweh, and a hammer that shatters the rock? Wherefore I will rise up against all these empty prophets, against those who steal the words of others, against those who repeat "'tis God's word" without thought, against those who lie with set purpose, and lead my people astray. When this people again asks in mockery, "What is the charge of Yahweh?" then shall you answer: "Why prate ye of Yahweh's charge? Ye are my charge, but I fling you aside! says Yahweh. I will punish the prophet or priest or whoever shall speak of the charge of Yahweh." Rather say one to another, "What is the answer" or "what is the word of Yahweh?" But speak no more of Yahweh's charge, lest his word should charge upon you and root you out and put you to eternal shame.

In this oracle Jeremiah speaks of the prophets, without qualification, as though not one of them was possessed by a better spirit or was an honourable man. We have already shown why we cannot accept this verdict.¹ No doubt many of Jeremiah's opponents acted in as complete good faith as he himself did. If he accused them of deceiving the people, they denounced him no less earnestly as a lying prophet, and since they were so numerous and were backed by the people, Jeremiah had to pay a heavy reckoning for his boldness.

He had already fled from Anathoth, as we have seen, to save his life. But he was in no less danger at Jerusalem, where he appears thenceforth to have resided, and where he may have had to discharge the duties of a priest. Here, of course, he must have seen still more to grieve and shock him than he had witnessed in his native place, and the attack upon the prophets, which we have just given, shows us the footing upon which he soon came to stand with the leaders of opinion in the capital. His mode of speech could not fail to give rise to violent collisions, which more than once brought his life into the utmost danger.

Let us glance at an event which occurred towards the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign.²

Jeremiah was deeply offended by the immoral lives of many Judæans who professed the utmost strictness in the outward observances of religion; and on more than one occasion he stood at the gate of the temple and cried to those who entered: "Thus says Yahweh of war-hosts: Repent and make clean your lives! Then will I suffer you to dwell in this land in peace.—Trust not the vain words: The temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh is here! If you do right and pronounce judgment truly, if

¹ Vol. III., pp. 282—286.

² Jeremiah vii. 1—16.

you oppress not the stranger, the orphan, or the widow, if you shed no innocent blood nor serve strange gods, I will have you to dwell in this land and prosper. But to steal, to slay, to commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal, worship other gods whom you knew not of old, and then come and stand before my face in this temple with the words of idle confidence: 'We are delivered!' in spite of all your abominations. . . . Do you think this temple is a den of thieves? Nay, but I have marked your deeds! Go but to Shiloh, where I was worshipped in olden time,¹ and see what I have done to it. If you shut your ears to all my warnings I will do to you as I have done to your brothers in Ephraim.—And as for me, Yahweh has forbidden me to pray for you any more, for he will not listen.”

Such was the strain in which Jeremiah repeatedly addressed the Judæans who came with offerings to the temple. Though he could never see that he produced any good result, he still cherished the hope that Judah might yet repent and turn to Yahweh, and that he might stay his avenging hand and deliver his people. But his hearers regarded him with ever-increasing aversion. His bitter reproaches were in themselves extremely offensive to the Judæans, for they were full of triumph in the favour of their god, and were accustomed to a very different style of address from the other prophets. Moreover, these fearful threats inspired them with positive dread; for we must remember that they looked upon a prophet's prediction not as the simple unveiling of an inevitable future, but rather as a kind of spell that produced a blessing or a curse. The prophet did not only announce the judgment, but actually brought it to pass by his preaching.² Jeremiah himself once said:³ “Thus says Yahweh to me: Behold! I will make my words a fire in your mouth, and will make

¹ Compare Vol. II., chapter xxii.

² Compare Vol. III., pp. 171 f.

³ Jeremiah v. 14.

the people fuel for it to burn." It was the fear which the men of Judah felt for the prophet of repentance that made their hatred so dire.

Yet they would probably have bridled their indignation and endured the prophet's denunciations out of reverence for Yahweh's word had he not gone the length of absolutely predicting the fall of the temple. But when he repeatedly pointed to Shiloh, that ancient dwelling place of Yahweh, and declared that the sanctuary on Mount Sion should likewise be laid waste and Jerusalem made a heap of ruins, then they could endure it no longer, and their fury broke all bounds.¹

So one day when Jeremiah was at his old task in the court of the temple, threatening the sanctuary with destruction and pointing to the fate of Shiloh, the closing words had hardly passed his lips when a tumult broke out amongst his hearers. The priests, whose duty it was "to put any fool who made himself a prophet into the stocks with a chain round his neck,"² and the prophets, whom Jeremiah denounced as liars because they always foretold deliverance and prosperity to Israel, so incensed the people against the messenger of repentance that his life was in the utmost danger. The tumult ran so high that the fierce cries of the populace reached the ears of the "princes of Judah," who appear on this occasion as judges, and who ordered the prophet and his accusers to be brought before them at one of the temple gates. The proceedings had now assumed a more regular character; the priests and prophets came forward as the accusers, while the assembled people represented public opinion by shouts of approval or disapproval which the judges would hardly venture to neglect in pronouncing sentence.

Jeremiah, when thus accused of blasphemy before [the

¹ Jeremiah xxvi. 1—19, 24.

² Compare Vol. III., p. 233.

princes and people because he had foretold the fall of the city and temple, retained all the courage of faith. There was but one line of defence open to him, and that was an appeal to Yahweh's revelation. His god had commanded him to say what he did. Would they not do well to hearken to him and amend their ways? Perhaps Yahweh might even yet avert his wrath. As for himself, he was in their hands; they could do what they would with him, but they might rest assured that if they injured him they would be shedding innocent blood, and would thereby draw down the vengeance of Yahweh upon the city and upon their own heads; for, in truth, he was Yahweh's emissary.

This was the only plea he could urge; for when a prophet uttered a prediction, he was never challenged to justify it by arguments, since it was not supposed to rest either on arguments or any other kind of proof, but simply upon the direct revelation of Yahweh. Who should decide whether a seer had really had such a revelation, or whether he "prophesied after the dictates of his own heart," as it was called? Meanwhile the steadfast dignity with which Jeremiah repeats his prophecy bears witness alike to his courage and his intense conviction.

His answer produced a deep and instantaneous effect, and gave rise to several colloquies. Surely a man should be heard when he appealed to Yahweh! This was a weighty consideration in itself, and the judges and people were still less disposed to lay violent hands on the man of God when one of the princes took his side. It was Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, perhaps the very Shaphan who had been an officer of Josiah's and to whom Hilkiah had first shown the newly-discovered book of the law.¹ Moreover, some of "the elders of the land" reminded them of what had taken place in the reign of Hezekiah. Had not Micah of Moresheth

¹ Compare Vol. III., p. 430.

foretold the fall of Jerusalem and the devastation of the temple in those days? But the king, so far from putting him to death, trembled before Yahweh, and prayed to him till he repented of his dread decree. They must take good heed not to bring the guilt of blood upon their souls.

Though only half-convinced, and by no means inclined to accept Jeremiah's word as a word of God, the priests and prophets could not venture to insist any further on his being put to death. "We must not slay the man who speaks to us in Yahweh's name;" on this principle the people declared that Jeremiah must be released, and for the present he was saved and was at liberty to preach as his god commanded him: "Woe to Judah, the sinful people! Woe to Jerusalem! Woe to the temple!"

When we hear Jeremiah comparing the word of Yahweh to a hammer that shatters the rocks, and observe that his discourses were almost always stern denunciations, full of terrific threats, we might well be disposed to think of him as a hard, rough man, as a pitiless judge with but little feeling for another's woe. But to do so would be to misjudge him utterly. Jeremiah was naturally soft-hearted even to a fault, and amidst the thunders of his stern rebukes rise ever and anon the words of tenderest pity. Hear how he poured out his heart in the time of Judah's humiliation, when a portion of the people was already in captivity.¹

What comfort is there for my sorrow? My very heart is sick. For the wailing of my people is borne from a distant land. "Is Yahweh not in Sion? Is Israel's king no longer with them?" Yes, he is with them, but why have they provoked him with their images, with vanities from foreign lands? "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!" For the hurt of my people am I hurt;

¹ Jeremiah viii. 18-ix. 1.

I am clothed in black, and amazement has laid hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Then why is the wound of my people unbound? Oh that my head were water, that my eyes were streams of tears! Then would I weep day and night for my people that are slain!

No less touching is his lamentation when the country was tortured by drought:¹ "Judah mourns and her gates languish. They bow down to the earth in mourning, and Jerusalem's cry ascends to heaven. The great ones have sent their servants for water; they go to the cisterns but find none; they come back with empty buckets in shame and confusion. The ground is all cracked for want of rain, and the plowmen are red with shame and cover their heads in confusion. The very hind leaves her fresh-dropped fawn to its fate, for there is no grass to eat. The wild asses stand on the hills, sniffing the air like sea-monsters, with their eyes sinking for lack of fodder. Although our sins bear witness against us, yet hear us, O Yahweh, for thy glory's sake; for our transgressions are many, and we have sinned against thee. O thou hope of Israel! thou who dost rescue him in his need! why shouldst thou be like a stranger in the land, like a traveller who comes but to spend a night? Why shouldst thou be like a man without counsel, like a strong man, who can bring no help? Thou art in our midst, O Yahweh! We are called by thy name. Forsake us not thou!"

Jeremiah, then, was capable of intensest pity, but the strength of his moral feeling filled him with burning indignation against the sins of his people. In common with all the Israelites he was convinced that Yahweh would chastise his people's offences sternly. The godless Judah, he thought, warned again and again, but still as wicked and impenitent

¹ Jeremiah xiv. 1-2.

as ever, was advancing to a fearful fate. What choice had he but to warn, rebuke, and threaten? Even the circumstances of his private life were affected by his profound conviction that days of darkness were at hand. He never married, because, as he expresses it,¹ "Yahweh told him that the boys and girls who should be born in Judah would die a frightful death with their fathers and mothers, and would lie unmourned and unburied, like dung upon the fields. They would perish by sword and famine, and their bodies would become a spoil to beasts and birds of prey."

The priest and prophet, whose gloomy presentiments kept him unmarried, stood almost alone. His habitual feeling of mournful indignation must have deeply affected his ordinary intercourse with men. How could he share the joys and sorrows of his fellow-citizens like one of themselves? He who, whenever he witnessed a disaster, thought to himself: "They deserve nothing better;" whose comment upon every joy was: "It will pass away;" could never feel at ease amongst his fellows. After the manner of the prophets, he threw this painful sense of isolation in the midst of a populous city into the form of a revelation from Yahweh. "Yahweh," he declares,² "said to me: Enter no house of mourning to go with the dead to his grave, and take not the wail of the dirge on your lips; for I have withdrawn my peace from this people; the full-grown and the young shall lie dead and unburied, and none shall bewail them nor share in the funeral meal. Neither go thou into the house of feasting, for thus says Yahweh of war-hosts, Israel's god: Behold I will take away all rejoicing, all the mirth of bridal joy."

We must not suppose, however, that Jeremiah was engaged in desperate conflicts every day. Weeks and months must have passed by without giving him any special occasion to speak. At these times we picture him withdrawing into

¹ Jeremiah xvi. 1-4.

² Jeremiah xvi. 5-9.

himself, and fixing his sombre gaze upon all around him, as he pursued his lonely path, while the people looked on him as half a saint and half a madman, and treated him with mingled respect, fear, pity, and ridicule.

But few understood him. We know of only one faithful friend who always stood by him, and that was a certain Baruch. A prophet here and there, such as Urijah of Kirjath-Jearim, may have taken up the burden of his discourses, a few distinguished citizens of Judah, such as Ahikam and Ebed-melech, may have listened to him respectfully and endeavoured to protect him, but in general he could exercise no perceptible influence, and seemed to be speaking to the wind. He saw nothing but disaster in the future, and with love and pity stirring the depth of his heart he warned, he prayed, he threatened, all in vain ! Ever more clearly could he see the judgment drawing nigh ; still more and more inevitable did the dire future become in his eyes, and no one would hearken to him !

What must not such a man have suffered !

The heart-rending cries that escape his lips from time to time reveal to us what was sometimes passing through his soul. " Ah me, my mother ! why didst thou bear me ? " he once exclaimed.¹ " I am at variance and strife with all the world. I lend to no man and no man lends to me. I am cursed of everyone." How terrible to stand upon a footing of such mutual distrust with one's fellow-men as not even to be able to indulge in ordinary intercourse with them !

But it pained the prophet still more to be made the constant object of mockery. Such experiences wrung words of lamentation from him, which reveal the inner secrets of his life.²

O Yahweh ! thou hast enticed me, and I have let myself be enticed. Thou hast been too strong for me ; thou hast

¹ Jeremiah xv. 10.

² Jeremiah xx. 7—18.

prevailed. I am derided all day long ; every one mocks me ; for, as long as I speak or cry, I must announce humiliation and desolation ; and the word of Yahweh covers me with shame and mockery unceasingly. Then I said to myself, " I will think of him no more, and never speak in his name again," but it was as if a fire were burning in my heart, were shut up in my bones. I strove to restrain it, but could not. Many a one have I heard muttering, " Accuse him ! Let us accuse him ! " My very friends are watching to see if I stumble : " If he slips, he will be in our power, and we can take vengeance on him." But Yahweh stands by me as a doughty champion ; my persecutors shall fall, shall be put to shame when their plots have failed, with eternal confusion that shall never be forgot. Yahweh of hosts judges righteously and sees into the heart. I shall surely behold how thou wilt avenge me, for I have committed my cause to thee.

Sometimes, on the other hand, he would bring to mind how often his god had rescued him from the hands of his foes, and would cry exultingly, " Praise Yahweh ! Sing to his glory, for he rescues the poor man's life from the hand of the evildoers." But he soon relapsed into the old strain, " Cursed be the day upon which I was born ! May no blessing rest on the day when my mother bore me ! Cursed be the man who brought the glad tidings to my father, ' a boy is born to you,' making his heart rejoice ! May that man perish like the cities which Yahweh pitilessly destroyed, while shrieks arose at the hour of dawn and the sound of war at mid-day ! Oh, would that they had slain me the moment I was born, or that my mother had been my grave ! Why was I born to see labour and sorrow, to consume my days in shame ? "

While condemning the bitter tone of such lamentations, we are compelled to add that still sharper invectives,

launched against his enemies, are recorded in Jeremiah's prophecies. Once, as he tells us,¹ they laid plots against him with the words: "We shall always have priests enough to teach us the Law, and sages gifted with insight, and prophets to preach the word. Come then let us plot against this Jeremiah, put him to silence with our words and refuse to listen to him." Whereupon the prophet prayed: "O Yahweh, hear my prayer! Must evil be rendered me for good? Remember how I have pleaded for them with thee! And now they seek my life. Make their sons a prey to hunger, and let them perish by the sword! Forgive not their iniquity and blot not out their sins, but utterly destroy them in the season of thy wrath!"

So far from excusing these passionate imprecations, we are deeply shocked by them; but the sharper the pain which finds expression in them, the higher must our admiration rise for the man who bore all this obloquy and enmity for God's sake, and persevered in speaking out what lay upon his heart.

These complaints do not appear to date from the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic activity, but from a later period, when it was growing harder and harder for him to persevere in the threatening tone of rebuke which exposed his life to such constant danger. We have given them here, however, in order that we may be able to form at the outset a clear conception of the prophet's general disposition and character.

The lamentations contained in some of the psalms, and their sudden transitions of feeling, correspond so perfectly with the outpourings we have just given that the conjecture forces itself upon us to regard Jeremiah as their author. Psalm xxxi., for instance, contains the following words of trust and supplication,² after many bitter lamentations:—

¹ Jeremiah xviii. 18—23.

² Ps. 14—17.

But as for me I trust in thee, O Yahweh !

And say : "Thou art my god."

My fate is in thy hand ;

Deliver me from the might of enemies and persecutors !

Make thy face to shine on thy servant ;

Save me by thy mercy.

O Yahweh ! put me not to shame, for I call upon thee.

Let the godless blush for shame, and be put to silence in the grave.

CHAPTER III.

JEHOIAKIM AND JEREMIAH.

2 KINGS XXIII. 36, 37 ;¹ JEREMIAH XXV., XXXVI.

WE will now consider Jeremiah's relations to king Jehoiakim.

All that we know of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, whom Necho had made king of Judah, is discreditable to him, and it is therefore only natural that we should suspect more harm of him than we actually know. Evidently the people had no confidence in him, and had therefore placed his younger brother upon the throne. And why did the Egyptian prince take Jehoahaz captive and make Jehoiakim king ? Had the latter undermined his brother's power by promising submission and a heavy tribute to Necho ? Likely enough, for he was quite capable of similar baseness. It is much to his discredit that although the tribute he had agreed to pay necessitated his exacting large sums of money from his subjects, he increased their heavy burdens further yet for the sake of indulging his fancy for building. He perverted justice

¹ 2 Chronicles xxxvi. 5.

to extort money from his subjects, and their very lives were not always sacred to him. Jeremiah, who had honoured Josiah and who thought very highly of Jehoahaz also, had nothing but stern rebuke for Jehoiakim. "Weep not for him that is dead (Josiah)," he exclaimed,¹ "Weep rather for the exile who shall return no more (Jehoahaz). But woe to him who builds magnificent palaces and holds back his workmen's wages ! Art thou fit to rule, unlike as thou art to thy father ? He did what was right, and therefore he prospered ; he maintained the cause of the wretched, and it was well with him. It is thus that men show they know me, says Yahweh. But thy desire is all for gold ; thou destroyest the guiltless and playest the tyrant. Wherefore thus has Yahweh decreed against Jehoiakim : They shall raise no dirge over him, for he shall be buried like an ass ; dragged out and cast away, far from Jerusalem's gates !"

We can well imagine the state of mind of the Judæans, and especially the men of Jerusalem, during the first years of his reign. They murmured against the imposition of such an unjust king by a foreign power, but yielded to what they could not shun, paid the taxes as best they might, and lent an eager ear to the prophets who still spoke, as they had done under Josiah, of Israel's election by Yahweh, of the imperishable glory of the temple, and the certainty that the Lord's people should inherit the earth. Necho, too, was far away, for he had crossed the Euphrates to measure his strength against the Assyrians and Babylonians ; and mankind in general fear no danger that is not close at hand. For the rest, we must note the instructive fact that the Mosaic school remained in the ascendant, although Josiah's defeat seemed a weighty argument against it, and the heathen school might well exclaim : That is what comes of Judah's deserting Baal and the Queen of Heaven ! No doubt

¹ Jeremiah xxii. 10—19.

such language was actually used at this time as well as later on,¹ and here and there a reaction towards heathenism must have set in; but on the whole the Mosaic school proved its command of the sympathies of the people, for in spite of the unfavourable turn which affairs had taken it retained its supremacy.

Thus did the first four years of Jehoiakim's reign go by. The king built palaces; and the people murmured but dared not rebel against the tyrant whom Necho supported, and the prophets for the most part held their peace in perplexity. But then an event occurred which gave an entirely new aspect to affairs.

The king of Egypt, to whom Judah amongst other countries was now tributary, had been established four years in Syria in undisputed supremacy when his power was suddenly extinguished by a severe defeat sustained at Carchemish, or Circesium, on the Euphrates. His victor was Nebuchadrezzar (always called Nebuchadnezzar in the books of Kings and Chronicles), the son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, the conqueror of Nineveh.

His kingdom, the capital of which was Babylon, is generally called that of the Chaldees. Who these Chaldees really were and in what relation they stood to the Babylonians is far from clear. They were probably a warlike northern tribe, whose leader had conquered Babylon and established himself as king. It is enough for us to know that the armies of the king of Babylon are always called Chaldean.

Necho was so utterly routed that he was forced to hasten back to his own land; but, as he passed through the Philistine territory, he succeeded in gaining possession of Gaza,² and was therefore in a position to resist any power which might pursue him, and dispute the approach to the Egyptian frontier, at least for a time. For the moment, however, he

¹ Compare Jeremiah xlv. 17—19.

² Jeremiah xlvii.

was free from apprehension. Nebuchadrezzar conquered several districts of Syria, but a victorious army, laden with booty and delayed every now and then by the resistance of a fortress, cannot keep pace with a flying foe; and, moreover, soon after the victory Nebuchadrezzar was compelled to relinquish the pursuit of the Egyptians by his father's death, which necessitated his immediate return to Babylon for his coronation. It was easy to see, however, that the delay was only momentary, and that the districts conquered by Necho would simply change their master.

Amongst these countries was the kingdom of Jehoiakim; and no Judæan who took a sober view of the situation could feel any great exultation at Necho's fall. The only real question was how the Chaldean monarch would treat the subject peoples; but, though this question was seriously asked by some, the first impression produced by the tidings of Necho's fall fostered far other thoughts. It is in human nature, especially at a low stage of intellectual development, to obey the dictates of passion and emotion rather than of reason. The Judæans had been defeated by the king of Egypt, and that was quite enough to make them rejoice in the humiliation of their oppressor. Even Jeremiah, though he had probably pointed to Necho as the instrument of Yahweh's judgments upon his people, rejoiced in the defeat of the Egyptians, and cried:¹ "This is a day for Yahweh of war-hosts; a day of vengeance! This day does Yahweh revenge him on his foes, and the sword devours its fill and is sated with blood; for this slaughter is a sacrifice to the Lord Yahweh of war-hosts, in the northern land, by the Euphrates!" We may fancy, then, what a lofty tone other prophets would take concerning Necho's defeat, and in what wild dreams they would indulge!

But common sense, quickened by fear, gradually resumed

¹ Jeremiah xli. 10.

its sway in many minds, especially when Nebuchadrezzar, after receiving homage in Babylon, set out again with a numerous army, and the former vassals of Egypt saw that they must soon be brought into contact with him. Many families from the northern districts of Canaan took to flight, and numbers of refugees sought safety in Jerusalem. Extreme fanatics persevered even yet in their tone of defiance, and predicted Nebuchadrezzar's speedy defeat and hopeless fall; but his appearance on the scene made a far different impression upon Jeremiah. If a certain degree of wavering had hitherto characterised his prophecies, if he had now pointed to one enemy and now to another as the vehicle of Yahweh's wrath, henceforth it was his settled conviction that Nebuchadrezzar was the rod of Yahweh's chastisement, and that no one would be able to stand against the Chaldean monarch. Moreover, he had hitherto believed that the door of grace was still in a measure open, but now he thought it was finally closed, and the irrevocable sentence had gone forth: "Judah must fall!" He himself enables us to trace the process by which he arrived at this intense conviction.¹ He had prophesied for three and twenty years; and other men of God, who insisted upon repentance, had supported him; but, he says: "The Judæans hearkened not to me. Therefore shall Yahweh deliver them into the hand of the king of Babylon, and they shall serve him seventy years. Nor shall Judah be the only people to bear the yoke of Nebuchadrezzar; for thus says Yahweh: Take from my hand this cup, filled with the wine of wrath, and make all the peoples to whom I send you drink of it, that they may reel and become delirious because of the sword which I shall send to work havoc amongst them. And I," continues Jeremiah, "obeyed. I gave this cup to Judah and Jerusalem first of all, and then to the king of Egypt, and then to his allies and

¹ Jeremiah xxv.

former vassals, Arabians, Philistines, Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Phœnicians, nay, the Greeks themselves and the men of Arabia Felix, and the Medes. Whether they will or not they must drink perforce, for Yahweh will utter a fearful roaring; misery to all the world! unburied corpses on all sides! Howl ye shepherds, and shriek ye who tend the flocks! Ye shall not escape, for the wrath of Yahweh is upon you and upon your land!"

Before going any further we must fix our special attention upon one particular expression in this prophecy, and make a remark as to the scope of Jeremiah's work.

We refer to the prediction that Judah should serve Nebuchadrezzar seventy years. When the scribes had succeeded the prophets among the Jews, and poured over the ancient oracles in order to make out how Israel's god had foretold the details of the future, immense value was attached by the believers to this announcement of the seventy years. They took for granted that it had been literally fulfilled, that the land had lain waste for seventy years, that precisely that period had elapsed between the beginning and the end of the Captivity.¹ For a long time the Christian interpreters of the Bible were no wiser than the Jews in this matter, and hence it is still common to speak of the seventy years' captivity. But, unfortunately, the calculation comes out wrong, for not quite fifty years elapsed between Jerusalem's devastation (586 B.C.) and the return (538 B.C.). This has been a sad perplexity to the commentators! Various attempts have been made to reconcile the prediction and the event. It has been supposed, for instance, that Jeremiah reckoned the seventy years from the first carrying away of the people, which took place under Jehoiakim, eleven years before the final

¹ 2 Chronicles xxxvi. 21.

deportation; but even this gives less than sixty years duration to the Captivity. Others reckon from the year in which Jeremiah made the prediction, which was the fourth of Jehoiakim, who reigned eleven years; but even this only gives something less than sixty-seven years before the return. Reckon the seventy years as we will, we cannot make them come out right.

We must utterly relinquish the idea that the details of the future were revealed to a prophet. He no more knew them than any one of us does, however firmly he may have believed he did. In this case, however, Jeremiah had evidently no intention of defining the exact period of Judah's subjection to the Chaldees when he spoke of seventy years. He simply meant to indicate a long period. Several years later, when a portion of the people was already carried away, he used the same expression once more¹ on an occasion which will presently demand our attention.

There is another remarkable feature in this prophecy, namely, the fact that it deals with foreign peoples.

It will be remembered that Jeremiah, when giving an account of his call,² describes himself as having been sent especially to the heathens. Now the beginning of his prophetic relations with the surrounding peoples dates from this fourth year of Jehoiakim, in which Nebuchadrezzar began to draw near. Henceforth he constantly spoke of the heathen nations, and sometimes, when their ambassadors were at Jerusalem, even addressed them directly. We still possess some of his discourses addressed to or dealing with the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Syrians, Arabians, and Elamites.³ These utterances are all of the same character, are all full of threats and predictions of humiliation by Nebuchadrezzar. Accordingly, they all stand in close con-

¹ Jeremiah xxix. 10.

² See Vol. III., pp. 426 ff.

³ Jeremiah xli. — xlix.

nection with the one we have given (Jeremiah xxv.); and it is remarkable that, in the Greek translation, they are inserted immediately after it, instead of standing, as they do, in the received Hebrew text, at the end of the book. It is not likely that the translator transposed these chapters himself; and we may therefore suppose that he found the arrangement he has adopted in the Hebrew, and that the chapters in question originally stood where he has them. This shows us that the book of Jeremiah's oracles, like so many other books of the Old Testament, did not at once assume the form in which we now have it, but was recast, it may be, several times. In this process modifications of more or less importance would inevitably be made. Some passages would be omitted and others introduced. For instance, the last three chapters of the book of Jeremiah have been added as an appendix, and contain an oracle against Babylon¹ that was certainly written in the land of captivity by a later hand than Jeremiah's, and an account of the taking of Jerusalem² identical with the conclusion of the book of Kings.

We may now return to Jeremiah.

Soon after the news of Necho's defeat had reached Judah, when Jeremiah was convinced that Nebuchadrezzar would come and chastise the people of Yahweh, he prepared to give them one more emphatic warning. Accordingly he commanded his faithful follower, Baruch, to write down certain oracles at his dictation that he might read them aloud to the people at the proper time, should he himself be prevented from going to the temple. What he proceeded to dictate was the substance of all his discourses, so far as he could remember them, from the beginning of his ministry. He was grateful to his faithful Baruch, who had gladly complied with his request and promised to read his oracles to the

¹ Chapters l., li.

² Chapter lii.

people, but he had little hope of any good result. There is a tone of absolute hopelessness in a short prophecy which he uttered on this occasion:¹ "Thus says Yahweh, Israel's god, concerning you, O Baruch! Why do you complain that Yahweh still increases your woe and that you find no rest? Say to Baruch: I, Yahweh, lay waste all that I once have planted, even the whole land. Why should you expect any good to come? Expect it not. For I will plunge all men into misery, says Yahweh. But wheresoever you go your life shall be spared."

Since Nebuchadrezzar, as we know already, did not march upon Egypt immediately after Necho's defeat, it was some little time before the occasion arose for which Jeremiah had committed his prophecies to writing. Meanwhile he must often have heard the taunting cry: "Where is the word of Yahweh now? When will it be fulfilled?"² But in the ninth month (our December) of the following year Nebuchadrezzar at last drew near, subduing all the countries as he went. Terror sank into the heart of the Judæans. A solemn fast was proclaimed, and pilgrims streamed to Jerusalem from every quarter of Judah, to implore Yahweh's pity in the temple.

Then Baruch went, as he had promised, with the roll of Jeremiah's oracles to the sanctuary. One of the priests, Gemariah, the son of the secretary Shaphan, had granted him the use of his chamber in one of the courts of the temple; and there he read all that Jeremiah had dictated to him, to everyone who cared to listen.

It appears that Gémariah had not understood that in granting Baruch the use of his room he was taking part in what might cause a great disturbance, for he himself had not thought it necessary to be present as Baruch read his roll, but was in a room in the king's palace in the company of other nobles and courtiers. His son Michaiah, however,

¹ Jeremiah xlv.

² Jeremiah xvii. 15.

was present, and was greatly terrified to hear that Jeremiah had announced the humiliation of Judah, and had even predicted that the sanctuary at Jerusalem would be devastated as the ancient temple at Shiloh had been. Not daring to take the responsibility of what was going on in his father's room, he hastened to inform him of the purport of the oracles which Baruch was reading.

Gemariah and the other princes immediately sent a certain Jehudi to bring Baruch, with his roll, before them. As soon as he came they made him sit down and read it to them also. On hearing the sombre predictions they were greatly alarmed, and all of them felt that the matter was far too serious to be kept a secret from the king; but they looked upon it as so extraordinary that they questioned Baruch very closely as to whether the words he had taken down from Jeremiah's mouth were really what he declared them to have been.

The surprise expressed by these princes seems very extraordinary, for in the first place if the roll contained nothing but what Jeremiah had already proclaimed during his years of public activity, we should have supposed that the princes could hardly have been ignorant of it; and in the next place it was only four years at most since Jeremiah had been brought before the princes of Judah for judgment because he had foretold the fall of Jerusalem. Had this event escaped their knowledge? We can only suppose that the "princes of Judah" were not the same in the two cases, and that hitherto Jeremiah's ministry had seldom or never attracted general attention, so that he was only known in a small circle as a preacher of repentance.

Be this as it may, his words were not neglected now. Gemariah and the other nobles were thrown into consternation. They dared not keep the matter a secret from the king, yet knew him too well not to fear the consequences of

revealing it to him. They trembled for the bold prophet and his faithful servant. Accordingly, they told Baruch to seek some place of concealment together with Jeremiah, after which they approached the king, leaving the roll in the room in which they had been sitting.

As soon as Jehoiakim had heard their statement he told Jehudi to go and fetch the roll and read it aloud to him, while all his courtiers stood round. It soon appeared that the princes had had good reason to dread the effect which these oracles would have upon him, for he could not even restrain himself till Jehudi had read the roll through, but as soon as he had listened to three or four pages gave such unmistakable signs of fury that Jehudi in terror slashed the parchment into strips with his knife, and threw it into the fire, while the other courtiers, instead of rending their clothes at this act of sacrilege, concealed their dismay and looked calmly on, except Gemariah and a few more, who did their best to restrain the king, but in vain.

It was well that the princes had advised Baruch to conceal himself, for Jehoiakim, not content with the roll being burned, immediately despatched several of the nobles, including a prince of the blood, to seize Jeremiah and Baruch and throw them into prison. But "Yahweh had hidden them," as Jeremiah afterwards said when he once more dictated the contents of the roll that Jehoiakim had burned. It need hardly be said that this second collection of oracles contained a fresh denunciation of Jehoiakim for having destroyed the roll in which Yahweh's words were recorded. Woe to him ! No descendant of his should ever sit upon the throne of David. His body should be cast out in shame, and should lie exposed to the heat of day and the cold of night. Yahweh would requite his wickedness and the wickedness of his race and of his courtiers ; and the evil which he had foretold should come upon all Jerusalem and Judah.

Jeremiah, then, evaded Jehoiakim's wrath ; but one of his fellow-workers was less fortunate. A certain Urijah of Kirjath-Jearim had adopted Jeremiah's language, and had prophesied against the city and the country ; but no sooner had it come to the king's ears than he planned the prophet's death. Not even his flight to Egypt saved him, for he was seized in that country by Jehoiakim's emissaries and brought back to Jerusalem, where he was put to death and even the honours of decent burial refused to his corpse.¹

Doubtless Jehoiakim could have laid his hands upon Jeremiah also had he really wished it ; but Jeremiah was a member of the powerful priesthood, and could rely upon the protection of his kindred and the princes of Judah not only as a prophet, but also as a Levite. The king, therefore, when his passion had cooled a little, would shrink from openly seeking his life. Jeremiah, then, was still allowed to live, and even to preach ; but he could find no credence for his message.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST DEPORTATION TO BABYLON.

2 KINGS XXIV. 1—17;^a ZECHARIAH XII.—XIV. ; JEREMIAH XXXV. ; HABAKKUK ; PSALMS XLII, XLIII.

JEHOIAKIM, who was not the man to risk his crown in the unequal conflict with Nebuchadrezzar, unless compelled to do so, submitted on his approach. His neighbours did the same, and all the countries up to the borders of Egypt were soon tributary to the Chaldean monarch. Nebuchadrezzar, therefore, turned his arms elsewhere, and Judah could take breath again, having simply changed her master.

All this gave the king but little uneasiness, though most

¹ Jeremiah xxvi. 20—23.

^a 2 Chronicles xxxvi. 6—10.

of the prophets were full of indignation. The fanatical enthusiasm which only five years ago had urged Josiah rashly to measure his strength against Necho's, had been by no means quenched by all the disastrous consequences of so ill-advised a measure, but in many quarters was hotter than ever. A specimen of the language sometimes held during this period is furnished by the oracle preserved in Zechariah xii.—xiv. Unfortunately there are so many obscure passages in these chapters that at present it seems impossible to determine exactly when they were uttered, and in explaining some of the details we are driven to pure conjectures; but we may regard it as certain that the author was a contemporary of Jeremiah. It appears that he did not live in Jerusalem, and, like Micah of Moresheth before him,¹ had many accusations to urge against the capital. What raised his special indignation was a murder that had been committed in Jerusalem, and which, as he declared, would be bitterly rued one day, especially by the king and his household, together with the priests.² He was probably thinking of Urijah of Kirjath-Jearim, whom the king had destroyed at the instigation of the priests.³ He anticipated a judgment upon Jerusalem, and especially upon the prophets, who would be covered with shame and would be put to death by their own parents, because they had prophesied lies in Yahweh's name.⁴ But, in spite of all this, Jerusalem would not only be rescued from the hand of her enemies, but would become "a cup of intoxication to all the peoples who come up against her, a heavy stone which all nations shall strain themselves vainly to lift. All the horses of her foes, says Yahweh, will I strike with blindness, and all their riders with bewilderment. Judah's princes shall be amongst the nations as fire cast into the midst of fuel, and

¹ See Vol. III., pp. 362—365.

² Zechariah xii. 10—14.

³ See p. 34.

⁴ Zechariah xiii. 1—6.

shall burn up all things, while Jerusalem abides. Yahweh will defend the dwellers in Jerusalem and make David's house like a god, like Yahweh's angel that goes out before him, and all heathens who come against Jerusalem shall perish."¹ In another passage the prophet appears to anticipate a partial devastation of the city;² but in the end Jerusalem will be saved, all the foes of Yahweh will be woefully chastised and spoiled, so that the remnant will honour Yahweh, and year by year will come to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem. Should any of them neglect to do so, they will be punished by lack of rain.³

The seer appears to have wavered in his conception of Jerusalem's probable fate, and to have expected a judgment upon her more confidently at one time than another. But in one thing he never wavered, namely, in the certainty with which he cried woe upon all the heathens who dared to attack the city in which everything was to be consecrated to Yahweh.⁴ These thoughts found only too congenial a soil in the minds of the men of Jerusalem. The city of Yahweh could not be devastated by the heathens; he who "stretched out the heavens, established the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him,"⁵ would never suffer it. Judah was therefore unconquerable, and must not yield an inch to the heathens.

Now Jehoiakim himself was by no means inclined to act upon such principles as these, but in the long run he was unable to resist the stream of public opinion guided by the fanatics, and after paying tribute to Nebuchadrezzar for three years, he finally renounced his allegiance, probably hoping for support from Egypt.

The Chaldean monarch was just then detained elsewhere, and was not in a position to come with an army and chastise

¹ Zechariah xii. 1-9.

² Zechariah xiii. 7-xiv. 5.

³ Zechariah xiv. 6-19.

⁴ Zechariah xiv. 20, 21.

⁵ Zechariah xii. 1.

the audacity of Judah in person. For the present he was obliged to hand over the task to the garrisons which he had left in some of the cities of the surrounding countries and to the vassal princes of Syria, Moab, and Ammon, who had not followed Jehoiakim's example, but had remained faithful to Nebuchadrezzar. These forces inflicted considerable sufferings upon Judah, in which the writer of Kings traced the hand of Yahweh chastising Judah for Manasseh's sins. At last, after three years, Nebuchadrezzar himself appeared upon the scene. Then terror sank into the hearts of the northern Israelites, who seem to have made common cause with Judah. Many families preferred flight to the risk of outrage at the hands of the Chaldeans, and many sought a refuge in Jerusalem, the only city that could stand a siege.

We can easily guess the tone Jeremiah took. He pointed ominously towards the north, whence the foe was advancing, and cried woe upon Judah! "Yahweh told me," he once declared,¹ "to buy a linen girdle, to put it on, and to preserve it from the damp. Afterwards he told me to hide this girdle amongst the stones in the bed of the Euphrates. Many days afterwards he told me to go and fetch it again, but when I came there it was all spoilt and marred. Then said Yahweh to me: Thus will I mar the bravery of Judah and the pride of Jerusalem; for as a girdle surrounds a man's loins, so would I have had my people surround me; but they would not hearken to me!" After all that we have said about the fictitious visions of the prophets,² there is nothing in this curious allegory that need surprise us. Of course Jeremiah did not really make these repeated journeys to the Euphrates, but simply selected this form under which to convey his denunciations.

But whenever the form he had chosen to embody the

¹ Jeremiah xiii. 1—11.

² Vol. III., pp. 297—299.

certainly of Yahweh's judgment was such as would readily lend itself to a visible presentation, he gladly availed himself of the fact. Once, for instance, he roused the curiosity of the men of Jerusalem by passing through the streets of the city attended by certain outlandish-looking strangers.¹ They were the Rechabites, so called after the founder of their clan, Rechab, the father of king Jehu's friend Jonadab.² Jeremiah, accompanied by the Rechabite chief, Jaazaniah, and some of his followers, entered one of the buildings that surrounded the temple, and went into a room, the use of which he had obtained. A number of people had followed him, and the room was soon full. Upon this he placed some cups of wine before the Rechabites and invited them to drink. But they declined, alleging that their ancestor, Jonadab, had forbidden them to drink wine, to build houses, to cultivate the land, or to plant vineyards, and had commanded them to dwell in tents in the country districts through which they wandered. They declared that they had always observed these precepts, and had only sought refuge in Jerusalem now out of terror for Nebuchadrezzar.

Jeremiah had reckoned upon their refusal, and immediately turned to the spectators with the words: "O men of Judah and Jerusalem, will you always be deaf to my words? says Yahweh. See how these men obey the precepts of their ancestor, while you . . . ! I never cease to send you prophets, but you hearken not to me. Therefore will I bring upon Judah and Jerusalem all the disasters of which I have spoken; but Rechab's posterity shall abide for ever!"

Jeremiah was still in constant danger of being called to a heavy account for his boldness. Once he went with certain distinguished men of Jerusalem, whom he had summoned for the purpose, by one of the southern gates of the city towards the valley of the son of Hinnom. He had an earthen

¹ Jeremiah xxxv.

² See Vol. III., p. 178.

vessel in his hands. When they were near the Tophet, the thunder of prophetic denunciation rolled from Jeremiah's lips, he rehearsed the sinful past of Judah, reminded his hearers of the infant sacrifices that had been offered there and all the other forms of their idolatry, linking the most dire threats to these shameful reminiscences. Last of all he dashed the vessel to fragments upon the ground with the words: "Thus says Yahweh of war-hosts: I will shatter the people that dwell in this city as one shatters an earthen vessel that cannot be pieced together again." Then he returned to Jerusalem with the nobles and repeated his denunciations in the court of the temple; but the priest Pashur, the chief of the temple police,¹ brought him to an abrupt conclusion by ordering him to be scourged and put into the stocks. The next day, however, he was set at liberty, and burst at once into the fiercest invectives against Pashur: "Yahweh no longer calls you Pashur, but *Terror-upon-every-side*; for you shall be in terror for yourself and all your friends in terror for you. Yet they, too, shall perish before your eyes, and I will deliver all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon. And you, Pashur, shall be taken captive to Babylon and shall die there, with all the friends to whom you have uttered false predictions!"²

While Jeremiah was uttering his terrible threats, and the majority of the prophets were giving currency to the wildest hopes and announcing the discomfiture of the foe and the glory of Yahweh's people in the immediate future, there were some who took up a position between the two extremes. We know of at least one prophet who was profoundly conscious of the depth of Judah's sin and the terrible punishment she merited, but nevertheless predicted victory to Yahweh's people and defeat to the Chaldees. It is Habakkuk.

His whole prophecy sounds like an echo of Jeremiah's

¹ See Vol. III., pp. 233, 234.

² Jeremiah xix.—xx. 6.

predictions. He takes up just the same attitude towards his people, and begins by bitter lamentations and by sternly accusing his countrymen of forsaking Yahweh's law and perverting justice. The misery inflicted by the Chaldeans was only what the Judæans had deserved by their abandoned lives. And yet the seer pleaded for his people. However deeply they were corrupted their enemies were more godless yet; for they deified their very weapons, vainly imagining that they were invincible. Would Yahweh suffer them to root out men who were more righteous than they? Surely he would not. The prophet had received a command from Yahweh to write down quickly what he saw, for soon his wrath would burst upon all the people's oppressors and he would root out all the workers of iniquity, while the righteous would be saved alive by trust in Yahweh. At the end of this short book of prophecies Habakkuk gives the rein to his imagination. He beholds Yahweh coming from the south with the pestilence before him and the lightnings under his feet, advancing to trample down the people's foes and deliver his anointed. Let every man rejoice in Yahweh, for he it is who gives the victory!

In their main conceptions, then, Jeremiah and Habakkuk are at one. They are both of them fully alive to the sins of their people; both of them trace the avenging hand of God in the misery brought upon Judah by the Chaldeans, and both of them believe that Yahweh's people is imperishable. But while Jeremiah lays such stress upon his people's sins that the glorious future almost sinks out of sight, Habakkuk believes that the punishment has now been sufficiently accomplished, and that it is high time for Yahweh to reveal his saving power. It need hardly be said that this latter view found more favour with the people than the other.

King Jehoiakim was no longer in the land of the living

when Nebuchadrezzar took Jerusalem. He had sown the seed, but the harvest was reaped by his son.

The Chronicler, however, tells us that as early as the third year of his reign Jehoiakim himself was taken captive by Nebuchadrezzar¹ and thrown into chains of brass, to be carried away to Babylon; and also that the enemy plundered the temple at the same time. Did he find it impossible to believe that so wicked a man as Jehoiakim should have come to so good an end? Be this as it may, his narrative has nothing to commend it, and Jehoiakim certainly "slept with his fathers" and was succeeded by his son.

Jeremiah, who had repeatedly predicted that Jehoiakim would lie unburied like an ass, and would not be succeeded by his son,² was not at all disconcerted by the non-fulfilment of his prophecy and the accession of Jehoiakim's son Jehoiakin in the teeth of all his curses. The fact is that though the prophets really believed that they could foretell the details of the future, they never forgot that their pictures of events to come were nothing more than deductions from the great religious truths to which their hearts bore witness; namely, Yahweh's pleasure in the pious man and his condemnation of the godless. No sooner had Jehoiakin, also called Coniah, ascended the throne than Jeremiah transferred to him the threats he had previously uttered against Jehoiakim. "As sure as I live, says Yahweh, though thou, Coniah, son of Jehoiakim, wert to cling to me as a ring clings to the hand that wears it, I would pluck thee off and deliver thee into Nebuchadrezzar's hand. Thou shalt go with thy mother into captivity, and shalt die in the strange land. Is Coniah a contemptible idol, or a vessel in which none takes pleasure, that he and his race must be cast out and hurled into an unknown land? O land, land, land! listen to the word

¹ Compare Daniel i. 1, 2.

² Jeremiah xxii. 18, 19, xxxvi. 30.

of Yahweh. Thus he says: Write down this man as childless and unfortunate; for none of his posterity shall sit upon David's throne or rule over Judah."¹

The writers of Kings and Chronicles employ the stock phrase with regard to Jehoiakin, and say that he did what was evil in Yahweh's eyes; but Jeremiah evidently supposed him to be punished for his father's sake, and not for any sins of his own. And, indeed, he was still quite young (according to Kings, eighteen; according to Chronicles, only eight), was completely under his mother's influence, and only remained three months upon the throne.

Nebuchadrezzar was now at the gates of Jerusalem. Was the people's enthusiasm suddenly cooled by his appearance? Probably not; but, though a host of prophets urged the men of Jerusalem to offer a vigorous resistance and confidently promised Yahweh's help in overthrowing the Chaldæans, they had little influence in the palace, and the court was altogether disinclined to run any fatal risks. Jehoiakin, with his mother and chief officers, threw themselves upon the mercy of the conqueror, and surrendered the city at discretion.

The Chaldæans treated conquered lands upon the principles followed by the Assyrians. They carried off the most prominent citizens as captives. Such was the fate of Judah. Thousands of its inhabitants were transported to Babylon. The book of Kings says ten thousand; and since this must be understood of heads of families, the total would be forty or fifty thousand. Jehoiakin and his courtiers were carried off amongst the rest.

It is difficult to exaggerate the terrors which exile must have had for the pious Israelite. Canaan, especially Jerusalem, was endeared to him by his faith, as well as by all other ties that bind men to their own countries. Even

¹ Jeremiah xxii. 24-30.

though he had risen to the thought that Yahweh was present everywhere and could make his power felt in every place, still Canaan was "Yahweh's holy mountain," "the glory of all the earth." Sion was his dwelling place; and there the praise of his worshippers was more acceptable than in any other spot. Many of Israel's songs are instinct with a deep attachment to the city of the temple, which the lapse of ages only served to strengthen. Let me give, as an example, a poem which was certainly not written before the time of Jehoiakin, and may be subsequent to the second or third deportation. I give it here because it reflects so perfectly the sorrow which consumed the pious exiles in a foreign land. It is contained in Psalms xlii. and xliii., which have come down to us as two poems, though they evidently made up a single whole originally:—

As the hart pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul after thee, O Yahweh !¹
My soul is athirst for Yahweh, the living god.
When shall I come and appear before him ?
My tears are my food day and night,
For they cry to me daily : "Where is your god ?"
I think of old times, and give memory rein,
How I went with the throng to the house of
Yahweh,
A festive host with song and praise.
Why art thou cast down, O my soul ! why art thou
disquieted in me ?
Hope thou in Yahweh, for I shall yet praise him ;
He is my saviour and my god.
My soul is cast down. I remember thee, far from the
land of Jordan,
Far from Mount Hermon and the little hills.

¹ Compare Vol. III., p. 249.

Flood breaks upon flood, mid the roar of thy billows ;

All thy waves and thy breakers pass over me.

Yahweh ordains his favour by day ;

By night I sing in his praise,

A prayer to the living god.

I will ask of the god, my rock : " Why dost thou forget me ?

Why must I always be clad in mourning because of my enemies' oppression ? "

They stab me to the heart with their taunts,

With their daily questionings : " Where is your god ? "

Why art thou cast down, O my soul ! why art thou disquieted in me ?

Hope thou in Yahweh, for I shall yet praise him ;

He is my saviour and my god.

Uphold my cause, O Yahweh ! against a pitiless people,

Help me against deceivers and liars,

For thou art the god that helps me ; why dost thou forget me ?

Why am I clad in black because of the oppression of my enemy ?

Send thy light and thy faithfulness to lead me,

And to bring me to thy holy hill and thy dwelling place ;

That I may come to the altar of Yahweh, the god of my joy,

And praise thee, O Yahweh, my god, with the harp.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul ! why art thou disquieted in me ?

Hope thou in Yahweh, for I shall yet praise him ;

He is my saviour and my god.

CHAPTER V.

THE FANATICS IN JERUSALEM.

JEREMIAH XXVII.—XXIX., XXXIV.; 2 KINGS, XXIV. 18—XXV. 1.¹

HAD the Judæans been guided by calm reflection, the fearful castigation they had just received would have shown them that they could not measure their strength against Nebuchadrezzar's, and would have kept them quiet for the future. But fanaticism is fatal to common sense, and the fanatics were ever gaining the ear of the Judæans more and more completely, not only amongst those still left at home, but amongst the exiles also. Many of the latter dwelt on the banks of the Chebar or Chaboras, a river of Mesopotamia, and there, too, as well as at Jerusalem, prophets arose, whom Ezekiel, one of their opponents, graphically describes as seducing the people by crying Peace! peace! when there was no peace; while some of them threw up a wall of clay, and others plastered it with untempered mortar! Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, predicted that hail and whirlwind would overthrow this wall and destroy the plastering.²

Jeremiah, who was left behind in Jerusalem, thought far more highly of the exiles than of those who remained. He once saw in his mind's eye—such at least was the form in which he clothed his thoughts³—two baskets of figs standing before the temple; the fruit in one was ripe and good, but that in the other was so bad as to be uneatable. These good figs represented the exiles. Yahweh would look upon them with favour, would bring them back to their own land and save them, and would give them a heart to know him, so that they should be his people and he should be their god.

¹ 2 Chronicles, xxxvi. 11—13.

² Ezekiel xiii. 1—16.

³ Jeremiah xxiv.

But the uneatable figs represented those left behind, with their king and their princes. Yahweh would destroy them.

The prophet's favourable estimate of the exiles did not rest upon anything he had ascertained as to their conduct or disposition. The fact was that he had no sufficient grounds as yet for saying anything about them, and was completely mistaken, as we shall soon see, in his account of them. His language was based on a mere supposition. He had long believed with equal certainty that a judgment would come upon Judah, and that Yahweh's people was, nevertheless, imperishable; and since the exiles had already received their punishment, he thought that Yahweh would deliver them, and make them his people, whereas the punishment of those still left behind was yet to come.

The Chebar was far away from Jerusalem; but the intercourse between Judah and the Euphrates was sufficiently close to ensure the occasional arrival of news from the exiles at Jerusalem. It was soon known that the banished Judæans, far from losing all courage, cherished the certain hope of a return to their fatherland, and confided in the assurances of such prophets as Zedekiah and Ahab that this consummation was close at hand. As soon as this came to the ears of Jeremiah, he wrote a letter to the exiles, in which he exhorted them to patience. They were to build houses and plant gardens, were to marry, and to pray for the peace of the city to which they had been transported. They who foretold a speedy return were false prophets, and all of them liars. The exiles would indeed return, but not till seventy years had gone.¹ Woe to the false prophets, Zedekiah and Ahab, adulterers and liars! Their fate would be so wretched that a saying would arise, "May Yahweh make you as miserable as Zedekiah and Ahab!"

This letter, while it failed to sober the exiles, raised the

¹ Compare pp. 28, 29.

intensest anger of the zealots, whom it denounced as liars. A certain Shemaiah, therefore, wrote a letter to the priest Zephaniah, who may have been a brother of the prophet Zedekiah, since both are described as sons of Maaseiah, informing him of the message that Jeremiah had written to the exiles, and begging him to put him into the stocks for it. But Zephaniah was very favourably disposed to Jeremiah and read the letter to him, upon which the prophet, as we may well believe, lost no time in writing another letter to Babylon containing dire threats against Shemaiah: When Yahweh blessed his people neither he nor any of his family should see it!

When Nebuchadrezzar carried Jehoiakin to Babylon as a captive, he placed his uncle Mattaniah, a son of Josiah, upon the throne, changing his name to Zedekiah. The author of Kings again employs the stock phrase, "he did what was evil in Yahweh's eyes," with respect to Zedekiah. He seems to have been what is commonly called "not a bad sort of man," that is to say, well-intentioned and kindly, but weak. Such a man would probably have become the tool of others, and shown his incapacity to rule under any circumstances; but at any rate in Judah, in the 597 B.C., the year of his accession to the throne, he was utterly out of place. Even if his subjects had been peaceably disposed, it would have needed rare wisdom successfully to govern the helpless, feeble, devastated country. But, as a fact, the Judæans, so far from patiently enduring their fate, at one moment burst into passionate lamentations and cries of despair; and, at another, lent an ear to the prophets who declared that Yahweh's people was invincible, and urged them to fly to arms. It is impossible, therefore, to exaggerate the energy and firmness which it would have needed to govern them well. "Can an Ethiopian change his skin, or a leopard his spots?

Then can you also do good, having once learned to do evil!" Such was Jeremiah's opinion of his contemporaries;¹ and, as far as their love of freedom was concerned, the comparison was certainly just. They were utterly untractable.

Hardly four years after Jehoiakin had been taken captive and the temple plundered, great schemes of revolt against the Chaldæan king were once more on the stocks! The princes of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and the Phœnician cities sent ambassadors to Jerusalem to conclude an alliance with Zedekiah.² The Judæan prophets gave the most confident assurances of success. Within two years all the utensils of the temple which Nebuchadrezzar had taken to Babylon would be brought back, and Jehoiakin would return, for the yoke of the king of Babylon would be broken.

Foremost amongst the prophets who uttered these oracles in the court of the temple was a certain Hananiah. Priests and people listened greedily to his words and surrendered themselves to his influence. But Jeremiah did not shrink from challenging his words, and foretold that the remnant of the people would be carried away captive, the temple and the palace spoiled anew, and all manner of misery brought upon the land. He who truly loved his country must bow submissively beneath the yoke of the Chaldæans, and shut his ears against these lying prophets. Alas! if they had been true men of God, they would have prayed Yahweh not to suffer the remaining treasures of Jerusalem to be carried away, instead of vainly promising that those already gone should come back again. But since they were so wedded to their folly, even the remnant of the treasures should be taken to Babylon.

On one occasion, Jeremiah and Hananiah came into public

¹ Jeremiah xiii. 23.

² Jeremiah xxvii., xxviii. In xxvii. 1, read *Zedekiah* for *Jehoiakim*. See *vv.* 3, 12, and xxviii. 1.

collision with each other. Jeremiah had sent wooden yokes to all the ambassadors of the surrounding peoples, with the command from Yahweh to give them to their respective princes, as a symbol of the course they would adopt if they were wise—the course of submission to Nebuchadrezzar. The prophet himself went through the streets of Jerusalem with a yoke upon his neck, as a visible sign to his people that they must bear the enemy's yoke in patience. Now once on a time, when Hananiah was again delivering his propitious oracles in the temple court, and the people were eagerly drinking in the welcome sound of his stirring words, Jeremiah suddenly appeared before him, with the yoke still upon his neck, and cried, in mockery, "Amen! No doubt Yahweh will confirm your words, and bring back all the temple treasures that have been carried away, together with all the exiles. But nevertheless," and here the prophet's manner suddenly changed, "I have a word to say to you in the hearing of all these people: We have had many predecessors, from ancient times till now, who have prophesied concerning great countries and mighty kingdoms, and have foretold misery and pestilence. But if a man of God foretold prosperity, he was never held a true messenger of Yahweh until his prediction was fulfilled." Maddened by this renewed imputation of prophesying lies, Hananiah leapt upon his opponent, tore the yoke from his shoulders and broke it to pieces, crying, "Thus says Yahweh: Even so will I break the yoke of the king of Babylon from off the necks of all the peoples within two years!" We may well suppose that such animating words, uttered in a tone of triumphant confidence and illustrated by so striking a symbolic action, were greeted by the people with vociferous applause. Even Jeremiah was silenced. He had no reply, and was driven off the field.

It was not till afterwards that it occurred to him, or as he put it that Yahweh told him, what he ought to have said. If

he had thought of it at the time, it might have made a very great impression upon the people. "The yokes you have broken were made of wood, but yokes of iron shall take their place; for thus says Yahweh: I lay upon the necks of all these peoples a yoke of iron, and they shall serve Nebuchadrezzar. Nay, the wild beasts themselves shall be subject to him. And as for you Hananiah, Yahweh has not sent you, and you have inspired this people with idle confidence. Therefore Yahweh will drive you out of this land, and within this year you shall die." When Jeremiah subsequently recorded these words, he added that in the seventh month of that same year Hananiah died.

In reading the passage we are naturally tempted to ask how Jeremiah could foresee the event, or if its agreement with his prediction was a mere coincidence, how he could hazard so definite a statement as to Hananiah's fate; but, in the light of our repeated observations of the great freedom with which the prophets used the words "Yahweh said to me," the enigma is by no means insoluble. When Jeremiah had been worsted by Hananiah, and was yet convinced that this prophet was a liar, who breathed an idle confidence into the people, he doubtless launched his denunciations against him without stint. Whether he really foretold that he would die within the year we may regard as exceedingly doubtful. The conjecture forces itself upon us that two months afterwards, when Hananiah died, Jeremiah traced the avenging hand of Yahweh in his fate, and since his own presentiment that the prophet of lies would come to an evil end was now fulfilled, involuntarily gave it a more definite shape.

Hananiah's and Jeremiah's hearers would have to suspend their judgment as to the truth of both utterances alike for some time to come, for neither of the predictions was as yet accomplished. The temple treasures were not

restored, but neither were those still left in Jerusalem carried off to Babylon. The fact was that the whole scheme of the revolt fell to pieces, perhaps because the king of Egypt, Psammetichus II., refused to join the confederacy, and the other princes, with all their desire for independence, shrank from defying Nebuchadrezzar without his support. The fanatical prophets might lament their people's want of faith, but they were forced to bide their time. Sooner or later they would be sure to have their way, for fanaticism is wonderfully infectious.

Five years afterwards, when Hophra (or Apries) succeeded Psammetichus II., and at once showed signs of a hostile disposition towards Nebuchadrezzar, the Judæans could no longer be restrained. The prophets sounded the note of triumph loud and clear. The king of Babylon, they declared, would not so much as dare to advance against Judah.¹ Jeremiah could not get a hearing. The war party steadily rose in influence at court. At last the feeble Zedekiah, though himself unwilling to try the fortune of war, was driven on by his nobles and by public opinion till he sent an embassy to Egypt to ask for help, broke his oath of allegiance, and rebelled against Nebuchadrezzar.²

Full soon would he repent of his rashness! The Chaldæan monarch was not the man to look on passively while his subjects unfurled the banner of revolt. That very year he set out to reduce Judah to submission. It appears that the surrounding peoples left Israel to its fate, for we do not find that Nebuchadrezzar made war upon them, and the Israelites complain that their neighbours, especially the Phœnicians and Edomites, made common cause with the Chaldæans. Judah could not hold out against the foe. A city here and there, such as Lachish or Azekah, might still offer some resistance, but could not hinder Nebuchadrezzar

¹ Jeremiah xxxvii. 19.

² Ezekiel xvii. 11—20.

from laying siege to Jerusalem. In the tenth day of the tenth month the city was invested.

We may well believe that when it had come to this the courage of many a Judæan failed him! Desertions to the enemy were far from rare; and Jeremiah's word of doom rang with terrific emphasis, "Woe! woe!" says Yahweh; "I give up Sion to be trodden by the heathen under foot." It is true that many Judæans still retained their lofty courage, and the fanatical hope of deliverance by Yahweh's might was still nourished by many of the prophets, but the reality was cruelly against them, and asserted its force in many a heart, including that of the poor vacillating king himself. Zedekiah excites our deep commiseration. He stands at the head of a people determined to defend itself to the last gasp, but is himself without either hope or courage. He sent two men to Jeremiah in his distress. One of them we know already as the prophet's friend, Zephaniah the priest.¹ The other was a certain Pashur, son of Malkiah. They were commissioned to entreat Jeremiah to consult Yahweh; perhaps at the intercession of the prophet he might work a miracle to rescue Jerusalem. Jeremiah had cold comfort for them! Nothing short of utter ruin was at their doors, he said. The king and his subjects had but one means of escape, unconditional surrender to the Chaldæans. All who remained in the city would perish.²

That a man of Zedekiah's character should await the event in passive helplessness rather than obey Jeremiah's advice is only what we should expect. Indeed, nothing short of a very firm and definite conviction on his part could have led him to surrender, since the great majority of the prophets were still loud in their promises of triumph even when Nebuchadrezzar was actually approaching.

But the most reckless of the zealots were troubled by

¹ See p. 47.

² Jeremiah xxi.

one uneasy doubt. Was it possible that Israel had incurred the wrath of Yahweh by its sins? There was certainly much wickedness amongst the people. Under such circumstances a century earlier the king might probably have been moved to sacrifice his first-born son in order to appease the offended deity. But such an act could not be even contemplated in Zedekiah's time, and some other sacrifice must be discovered. Now it was written in the law of Yahweh that all Israelitish slaves, whether male or female, must be restored to liberty after six years' service;¹ but the commandment had been a dead letter with most of the Judæans. The king and his nobles, however, now determined to carry out this precept, and a solemn fast-day was proclaimed, at which they confirmed their resolution with an oath. The priests cut an ox into two, and laid the bleeding halves in the temple court. Then Zedekiah and his courtiers passed between the pieces to ratify their pledge;² and, having thus secured the help of Yahweh, awaited the attack of the Chaldeans.³

It seemed as though this measure had been crowned with the desired result, for hardly had Nebuchadrezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, when an Egyptian army advanced to its relief and the Chaldeans set out to meet it. The men of Jerusalem could breathe more freely now that their enemies were out of sight, and all went on as before. Jeremiah had to submit once more to the taunting cry of those whom he had threatened with destruction: "What has become of your word of Yahweh now?" The prophets uttered their confident predictions of success more boldly than ever. Yahweh, they said, was helping them already. The people firmly expected that Nebuchadrezzar would be defeated by the Egyptians.

¹ Exodus xxi. 2-6; Deuteronomy xv. 12-18.

² Compare Vol. I., p. 159. ³ Jeremiah xxxiv. 6-22.

Meanwhile Jeremiah held to his threatening predictions, and the conduct he was now forced to witness on the part of the Judæan nobles raised his indignation to a pitch which could only speak in the sternest denunciations. For the fact was that no sooner had the besieging army retired than the nobles began to grudge the cost of their obedience to Yahweh's law, broke their vow, refused to give their slaves the promised liberty, and even revoked the freedom they had already conferred upon some of them. Jeremiah could not stand by tamely. "I commanded you to let your slaves go free, says Yahweh, and since you refuse, and break your word, I will let loose sword and pestilence and famine upon you. All the perjured ones shall perish, and Zedekiah himself shall fall into the hands of the Chaldæans when they return."

"When they return!" cried the delinquents in mockery. "Yes! but they never will return. Yahweh is roaring from Sion and consuming his people's foes!"

The fanatics were supreme in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

2 KINGS XXV. 2-21;¹ JEREMIAH XXXII, XXXVII-XXXIX. 10.

SUCH a man as Jeremiah was naturally regarded with no friendly eye by the popular leaders. Well founded reports were current that, when Zedekiah had sent certain messengers to him to implore him to intercede for the people with Yahweh, he had answered that the Egyptian army would inevitably return to its own land, and the Chaldæans would again lay siege to Jerusalem. 'Let no man soothe himself with idle hopes,' he had said, 'for though the Judæans were

¹ 2 Chronicles xxxvi. 14-21.

to smite the Chaldeans till only wounded men were left, yet even they would take the field again and burn down Jerusalem. So irrevocably is the fall of the sinful city decreed.'— Was it not monstrous to allow this Jeremiah to utter such fearful predictions? What good could possibly come of it? And what confidence could be placed in a man who openly declared that the only escape from death was instant surrender?

Even before Nebuchadrezzar returned, Jeremiah discovered the profound suspicion with which he was regarded; for once when he was going out of the city by the gate that led towards the land of Benjamin, perhaps on his way to Anathoth, the captain of the guard, a grandson of Hananiah, retained him in custody, and accused him of intending to desert to the enemy. The prophet's denial was not accepted, and he was brought before the princes. They were bitterly incensed against the suspected traitor to Yahweh's people; appearances were strongly against him, and they sentenced him to be scourged and then thrown into prison, into a terrible dungeon, the horrors of which would endanger his very life should he remain there long.

In a few days, however, Nebuchadrezzar's army once more appeared before the gates of Jerusalem, for the Egyptians had retreated in terror; and now the prophet was brought out of his cell, at the king's command, to tender his counsel. If Zedekiah hoped for a more favourable oracle than before he was disappointed, for the prophet answered again that the king would fall into the power of the enemy; and his words borrowed a deeper significance from the question he could now add. "What has become of all those prophets who declared that Nebuchadrezzar would return no more?" Jeremiah took this occasion to entreat the king not to send him back to that fearful dungeon, for he was guilty of no wrong to king or people. Zedekiah granted his request

and transferred him to another prison, where his sustenance was amply provided for, and he was even allowed to see his friends.

In the course of the siege Jeremiah uttered a remarkable prediction as to the fate of Zedekiah.¹ He told the king that he, too, would fall into the enemy's hand when Jerusalem was sacked and burned down; that he would see the king of Babylon with his own eyes, would speak to him, and would be carried away to his capital. But in spite of this he would not fall by the sword, but would die in peace and would have the funeral of a king. This prophecy is very remarkable for the light it throws upon the secret impulses of a seer's heart, and the influences that affected his oracles. In the first place it is by no means easy to form a distinct idea of what Jeremiah supposed would really be the monarch's fate. He would be carried to Babylon as a prisoner, and yet would be buried with the honours of a king like his predecessors. Would he be restored to the throne? We can hardly believe that this was really Jeremiah's meaning; and yet it seems to have been so, for in another prophecy, or another version of the same,² he foretells that the king will go to Babylon and live there "until Yahweh visits him." The only explanation of Jeremiah's favourable anticipations with regard to Zedekiah appears to be found in his own opinion of the king. He thought he was not as bad as others—his nobles, for instance—and would therefore not be so heavily chastised.

Was Jeremiah right in placing Zedekiah above the reckless leaders of the people? I think not. They were honest fanatics; while he, though well-intentioned and comparatively sober-minded, was utterly weak. Surely this is no reason for preferring him to them. On the contrary; they knew no better, while he pursued with hesitating

¹ Jeremiah xxxiv. 1-5.

² Jeremiah xxxii. 1-5.

steps the course he knew to be wrong. They were true to their faith, such as it was, whilst he simply obeyed the dictates of his own trembling heart. If they had seen their error they might have had the courage to confess it and to change their conduct ; but what could be expected of a man without either courage or principle ? But we need not wonder that Jeremiah judged otherwise ; for while the fanatics persecuted him and sought his very life, Zedekiah defended him. The king's personal regard for the prophet secured his favour in return, and prevented his foretelling too cruel a fate for him. Even prophets were sometimes guided by their own personal preferences.

The Chaldeans, then, had laid siege to Jerusalem ! The city was too great to be completely surrounded, but the enemy could easily cut off its supplies. On three sides, indeed, this was all they could do, for the approach was so precipitous as to be almost impracticable, or, at any rate, to admit of adequate defence by a very small force. It was only from the north that a besieging army could attack the city with any hope of success, and even there it was fortified by a strong wall with lofty turrets, within which a second wall defended the upper city, where the temple and the palace stood. This position might still be held even if the lower city were taken. Against this outer wall the first attack was directed ; but the art of siege was still in its infancy, and it needed a vast expenditure of time and labour to effect a breach in a wall of any thickness. The besiegers attempted to undermine the walls and crush them with battering rams, or to construct movable towers to rise above the parapet, and enable the soldiers in them to drive off the defenders of the walls with stones and arrows, and then take possession of them themselves. Sometimes they would attempt to storm the place by scaling the wall with ladders. If a city were strongly

fortified and manned by a determined garrison, a siege was a very long affair, and the place was generally reduced at last by hunger rather than by the sword. Samaria, for instance, stood a siege of three years before Shalmaneser succeeded in taking it.

Jerusalem was very strongly fortified and the garrison was brave; but the city was so full of fugitives and apparently so ill-provisioned that the direst want soon raged. Scenes of horror became familiar. Children cried in vain for bread, and fell down exhausted in the streets. Rich men died of hunger. Young and old lay gasping for life. There were even mothers who devoured the very children at their breasts.¹

Under these circumstances Jeremiah might account himself fortunate in sitting quietly in prison and receiving his daily rations of bread by favour of the king. But the boldness with which he still foretold the fall of Jerusalem was once again to bring his life into the utmost danger.² We can really hardly blame the princes of Judah for being driven almost to madness when they heard Jeremiah declare in so many words to all who would listen that there were two ways open to them, one of which led to death and the other to life, the former being to remain in the city and die by sword, by famine, or by pestilence, and the latter to go over to the Chaldeans and live!—What this came to was neither more nor less than publicly recommending desertion. The leaders of the people were straining all their powers to keep up the courage of their soldiers, and how could they suffer an influential man deliberately to discourage them? They were depressed and hungry enough already. Unless Jeremiah's mouth could be stopped the fall of the city was inevitable. Accordingly, they accused him before the king,

¹ Lamentations ii. 11, 19—21, iv. 4—10.

² Jeremiah xxxviii.

and clamoured for his execution. Zedekiah was not the man to resist their demands, and though personally well disposed towards Jeremiah, he gave them leave to put him to death, upon which they immediately threw him into a well. There was no water in it; but if he were not choked by the mud he would inevitably die of hunger.

Jeremiah's firmness in not shrinking even from death shows his integrity, courage, and faith, and gives him a title to our respect. But in other regards his conduct during the siege is anything but pleasing. If, in spite of his firm conviction that Jerusalem must fall, he had prayed in the ardour of his love for his poor, misguided people, we should have felt far greater sympathy with him than we do now, as he terrifies his cowed and starving countrymen with ceaseless prophecies of ruin and misery.

Jeremiah, however, was still to have the opportunity not only of repeating his threats, but of testifying to his firm belief in the restoration of Judah, for he was again rescued from the pit. His deadliest foes had indeed lost all reverence for the preacher of Yahweh's word in hatred of the man whose utterances produced such disastrous results, but there were others whose respect for God's word outweighed all other considerations. Jeremiah found an advocate with the king in a certain Ethiopian, named Ebedmelech. Hardly had this man heard of the prophet's fate when he hastened to the king, whom he found at the scene of hostilities by the Benjamite gate, and reminded him what a terrible sin it was to murder a prophet. Zedekiah, who was always easy to talk over—especially in this case, since he really esteemed Jeremiah—countermanded his former orders, and sent Ebedmelech with three¹ men to draw Jeremiah out of the pit and restore him to his former place of confinement. Upon this the prophet rewarded his deliverer by predicting that

¹ In v. 10 *thirty* is a mistake for *three*.

when Jerusalem fell he would be spared, because he had trusted in Yahweh.¹

Shortly after this Zedekiah privately summoned the prophet to another consultation. Were it not so melancholy to see a man devoid of principle and courage tossed backwards and forwards like a reed in the wind, there would be something almost ludicrous in this interview between the prophet and the king. "I have a question to ask you," said the prince; "hold nothing back from me." The seer knew his drift, and answered: "Will you not destroy me, if I tell you the truth? And, after all, what will my advice avail? You will not obey it." Then Zedekiah swore that he would not put him into the power of his enemies, and Jeremiah, trusting to this feeble pledge, repeated his former oracle. If the king surrendered voluntarily to Nebuchadrezzar the city would not be burned, and he and his would be spared; otherwise there was no escape for him. The craven monarch urged his dread that he might be given up to the Judæan deserters in the camp of the Chaldæans if he surrendered, and be maltreated and mocked by them. Jeremiah reassured him on this point, and repeated his advice. Would Zedekiah obey it? If the prophet had for a moment cherished such a hope, he was soon disabused by a request which stamps the king once for all as a craven. "Let nobody know what we have been speaking of! Should the princes hear that we have seen each other, and should they promise you your life if you tell them all that we have said, then answer that you only begged me not to have you thrown into the well again." Jeremiah promised, and when the princes actually questioned him on the matter he lent himself to the king's unmanly deception.

Truly, the last king of David's house was a pitiable creature!

¹ Jeremiah xxxix. 15-18.

The siege ran the ordinary course. The Chaldeans attempted to effect a breach, the Judeans to disable their battering-rams. In front of the walls there were constant skirmishes, and behind them famine raged, with pestilence in her train.

Jeremiah in his prison, where he had many visitors, saw suspense and terror written upon every countenance, and had neither the power nor the will to cheer the hearts of his countrymen. On the contrary, he was still impelled to proclaim the certainty of Jerusalem's fall, though at the same time he cherished and repeatedly proclaimed the deep conviction that the people of Yahweh could not perish for ever.

For instance,¹ his cousin Hanameel came to him one day and offered to sell him his estate at Anathoth. The prophet, who afterwards declared that Yahweh had given him notice of Hanameel's visit, accepted the offer, and took advantage of the purchase to testify in a striking manner to his faith in Judah's restoration. He commanded his faithful Baruch to inclose the deed in an earthen vessel, in the presence of his cousin and two witnesses, and so keep it safe, for Yahweh testified by that action of his servant that the time should come again when houses, fields, and vineyards should be bought and sold in Canaan.

He made this declaration in a tone of unwavering conviction; but when he had concluded the whole transaction, he himself was seized by that sense of doubt and oppression which not unfrequently tortures the heralds of truth, especially when in a state of spiritual exaltation, and led on by their own most sacred convictions, they have for a moment transcended even themselves. "O Lord!" cried the seer in prayer, "what dread things shall come to pass! The Chaldeans, as thou hast said, shall take the city! And yet thou hast bidden me buy this land." But his courage was

¹ Jeremiah xxxii.

restored when Yahweh's answer echoed through his soul : " The Chaldeans shall indeed destroy the city, because my people was guilty. But in days to come I will collect them once more, that they may be my people and I their god. Then shall they all be of one mind towards me, and shall so fear me as never again to renounce my service. As surely as Jerusalem shall be taken by the Chaldeans, so surely shall fields and houses be legally bought and sold by those who return from exile to this land in days to come."

We possess several other oracles in which Jeremiah foretells the return from the Captivity and Judah's restoration not only to her former splendour, but to far greater glory yet. Probably the main contents of these oracles date from the last year of Zedekiah's reign;¹ but we cannot be at all sure that they were actually uttered in the form in which we now have them. For in the first place the prophet did not commit them to writing until after the fall of Jerusalem, when all that he had subsequently seen and felt must have coloured his account of his former utterances, even without his intending it. And in the second place these special prophecies were diligently studied and freely applied by the Judæans of a later age, especially after the return from the Captivity, and occasional additions were made without any scruple, so long as they were supposed to accord with Jeremiah's spirit.

Now one of these discourses, which contains a description of Israel's religious condition in the Messianic age which was to follow close upon the accomplishment of the divine judgment, takes a loftier flight than almost anything else that ever passed the lips of a prophet. It runs as follows:² " Behold, the time comes, says Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Judah and with the house of Israel; not such as the covenant which I made with them

¹ Jeremiah xxx., xxxi., xxxiii.

² Jeremiah xxxi. 31—37.

when I redeemed them out of Egypt, and which they have broken; but this is the covenant I will make with them after the days of misery: I will write my law in their hearts and will be their god, and they shall be my people, and they shall no longer exhort one another and say 'know Yahweh!' for they shall all of them know me, from the least to the greatest, for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more. Thus says Yahweh, who makes the sun for a light by day, the moon and the stars to shine by night, who troubles the sea till its waves roar, whose name is Yahweh of war-hosts: 'When all these cease to obey me, then shall Israel's seed cease to be my people.' Even thus speaks Yahweh. 'If the heaven can be measured above and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I reject the whole race of Israel because of its sins.'"

For an after generation it was consoling to study the oracles of the one prophet of Zedekiah's time who had foretold Jerusalem's fall and subsequent restoration, but the impression made by the man of God upon his hearers, with the dread reality before their very eyes, was as far from consoling as it well could be. We can almost see Jeremiah in his prison, or rather in the open prison court, generally accompanied by Baruch and some few other of his faithful friends or relatives! From time to time, as the day wears on, certain men of Jerusalem and other Judæans come to consult him. How scared and squalid they look, pinched by famine and pursued by fear! Their relatives have fallen a prey to want, or pestilence, or the sword of the enemy, and the future is full of terror. They are talking together of the ghastly details of the day's occurrences. Then from time to time the prophet raises his head, especially when he hears how the fanatics still promise deliverance, or when the battle-cry of the assaulting Chal-

dæmons and the crash of the blocks of stone hurled from their catapults penetrates to his prison. The sombre fire gleams in his eyes as bitter reproaches and terrific threats stream from his lips once more. His hearers are crushed with terror. One bursts into wild lamentations, another breathes a prayer to Yahweh for deliverance, others seek relief from their depression by rushing to the post of battle, and murmur: "May Yahweh frustrate all these fearful words!" Sometimes a fierce glance falls upon the prophet from some enthusiast who has come to hear with his own ears whether the man of God whom the king's favour protects can really dare to utter words which are like a consuming fire for Israel. But the greater number are simply plunged into terror and despair by his predictions. Then why do they return the following day? Perhaps because, when stricken with fear, we find a sort of fascination in multiplying images of terror, or because Jeremiah's hearers found his words in harmony with their own convictions. And this was the very reason why his influence sapped the courage of his hearers so fatally, and sent them away more spiritless and depressed than ever. Even when he looked on, past the fall of Jerusalem, into the future, and spoke of the days of joy which the restored and converted Israel should taste when it had once more become Yahweh's own people and he its god, even then for one here or there who felt the consolation there were many who did not in the least understand him, and were unmoved by all he said. The immediate future was all they cared about.

At last, after standing a siege of a year and a half, Jerusalem fell. In vain had the besieged broken down their very houses and palaces to stop the breaches in the walls with the stones.¹ In the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign, on the ninth day of the fourth month, the lower city was taken

¹ Jeremiah xxxiii. 4.

by storm. The inner wall still opposed the progress of the foe, and the upper city might have held out for some time. The fanatical prophets were doubtless ready to declare as loudly as ever that Yahweh would at least defend his sanctuary from pollution by the heathen. But Zedekiah and his nobles gave up the conflict, and, accompanied by most of the men under arms, fled from the city under cover of night; but they found no safety in flight, for they were pursued and captured. The city was now defenceless, and Nebuchadrezzar's generals took possession of it while he himself was at Riblah in Syria.

For a whole month Jerusalem was given up to the soldiery, who endeavoured to compensate themselves for the privations they had suffered during the siege. The treasures of the temple and the palace, including the great laver and the pillars Boaz and Jachin, were carried away. The two chief priests, the principal generals, five distinguished officers of the court, the minister of war, and sixty nobles who were taken as the representatives of the people, were carried off to Riblah and there put to death. Three thousand and twenty-three families of Judah had already undergone the sentence of exile before the city was taken, and eight hundred and thirty-two were now added from Jerusalem.¹ A fearful lot was reserved for Zedekiah. His sons were put to death in his sight; then his eyes were put out, and he was covered with chains and carried off to Babylon, where he died in a dungeon. Jeremiah's prediction that Yahweh would visit him again, and that he would have an honourable burial, was never fulfilled.

Such was the fall of Jerusalem in the year 586 B.C.

¹ Jeremiah lii, 28, 29. In v. 28, *seventh* should be *seventeenth*.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REMNANT IN JUDÆA.

2 KINGS XXV. 22—26; JEREMIAH XL.—XLI. 7a.

THE population of Judah had been woefully thinned by famine, pestilence, and war. Cities and villages were in ruins. Fields lay untilled for want of labour. Commerce was at a stand-still. The country was rendered unsafe by bands of marauding Judæans, who had been driven from house and home. Most men of any distinction or ability were in exile. There was imminent danger of total anarchy. The Chaldæan king, however, did his best to save the country from this fate; for otherwise he would never have been able to secure the tribute he expected from it. Accordingly, he appointed Gedaliah, a Judæan of noble family, as governor. This was the man whose father, Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, had played a prominent part in Josiah's reformation, and had protected Jeremiah against the rage of the prophets.¹ The choice was a very happy one. Gedaliah was a man of peace, and seems to have inspired such remarkable confidence by his personal character that several bands of outlaws voluntarily submitted to him and dispersed. He found means of persuading many who had taken up a wandering life to settle down again in the cities and get in the remnants of the grape and olive harvest. Many of the Judæans, who had already left the country, perceiving that Nebuchadrezzar had still left something that might be called a people of Judah, and that Gedaliah was established as the governor, now returned to their country.

At Mizpah, the residence of the governor, Jeremiah also

¹ 2 Kings xxii. 12—14; Jeremiah xxvi. 24.

settled. There are two traditions as to his fate after the taking of Jerusalem, both of which are preserved in the book that bears his name. According to one account,¹ he was kept a prisoner for a month after the capture of the city, until Nebuchadrezzar himself arrived, and was then set at liberty. According to the other,² which is far more probable, he was carried off with other prisoners to Ramah, where his chains were struck off at the command of Nebuzar-adan, the king's plenipotentiary. In any case, he was treated by the Chaldeans with great distinction. This was very natural. His exhortations to peace and submission had very nearly cost him his life in Jerusalem at the hands of the zealots; but now they secured him no little consideration with the enemy, who had doubtless heard of him from the deserters.

The captain of the life-guard accordingly signified to the man of God, with marks of profound respect, that he entirely agreed with his teaching. It was just as he had said; Yahweh had punished Judah for its sins. In the king's name he now gave the prophet his choice; if he liked to go with them to Babylon, he should be well cared for there, and should live in wealth and honour. If he preferred to stay in his own land, he might go to Gedaliah or settle wherever he liked. Jeremiah chose to stay, as we should have expected from his deep love for his people. The sacrifice he made was great, for the favour of Nebuchadrezzar entitled him to expect an easier life in Babylon than he could ever hope for in his own defenceless land; and his people had certainly put him under no obligations to them. But the man who had braved his people's hatred rather than be faithless to his god was proof against the seductions of rest and honour, and determined to stay and comfort those whom he had hitherto been compelled to reprove and threaten almost without ceasing.

¹ Jeremiah xxxix, 11—14.

² Jeremiah xl, 1.

And the miserable remnant was in sore need of comfort !

The first four elegies in the book of Lamentations reveal the emotions of many a heart after the fall of Jerusalem. An ancient though mistaken tradition ascribes these alphabetical poems to Jeremiah. But they constantly speak of the fall of Jerusalem in a tone of bitter surprise, which would be more than strange in one who had long predicted the event. Jeremiah would hardly have prayed, as the author of the first elegy does,¹ that all the foes of Judah might be punished for their conduct towards Yahweh's people, or reproached Egypt, as the author of the fourth song does,² for not having supported the Judæans. Least of all would he have joined in the lamentation, raised by the writer of the second elegy,³ that the prophets had no more visions. For he himself was not without a vision, and he can only have rejoiced to see the others hold their peace in confusion. Doubtless Jeremiah, with his sensitive and tender disposition grieved deeply over his people's misery ; but his opinions as to its causes on the one hand, and its fruits on the other, caused him to use very different language on the subject from that of others who did not share his views. The five poems in the book of Lamentations all differ, the first four as well as the fifth, in authorship and even in date.

It was natural enough that the devastation of Jerusalem should be the subject of numerous elegies. " How deserted is the city that once was full of people ! She that was great amongst peoples is now like a widow. She who was a princess amongst the provinces is now a vassal. The city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth, is covered now with scorn. The travellers that see her ruins shake their heads upon her. Yahweh, in his wrath, has covered the daughter of Sion with a cloud, cast down the

¹ Lamentations i. 21, 22.

² Lamentations iv. 17. ³ Lamentations ii. 9.

glory of Israel from heaven to earth, and thought not of the footstool of his feet in the day of his anger."¹ Before their eyes the poets saw the appalling fact that the king, "the breath of their nostrils, Yahweh's anointed, the man in whose shadow they had hoped to find rest," was taken captive, that Judah's princes, who had once been "purer than snow and whiter than milk, ruddier in body than rubies and more shining than sapphires," were now "blackened and shrivelled in skin," while priests and prophets had been murdered in the sanctuary and public worship had come to an end.² And besides all this the misery of the thought that it was all their own fault, coupled with the contempt of their enemies,³ rendered the memory of their glorious past a torture to them. And yet they must thank Yahweh for not having utterly destroyed them,⁴ and for having left them the hope that he might some day think of his people in mercy once more.

Of course the Judæans entertained anything but friendly feelings towards the Chaldæans; but they were more bitter yet against their own neighbours and relatives the Edomites, who had not only yielded to the overpowering forces of the Chaldæans and made common cause with them, but had even exulted in the sight of Jerusalem's fall. It was probably soon after this event that a certain prophet, otherwise unknown to us, of the name of Obadiah, uttered the oracle against the Edomites which is preserved in the little book that bears his name. He inveighs against them vehemently, and reproaches them with having taken a part in the devastation of Jerusalem, with having shared the feelings of the Chaldæans on the day of its fall, and even with having destroyed the fugitives. In revenge he threatens them with destruction on the day when Yahweh reveals the greatness of his might.

¹ Lamentations i. 1, ii. 1, 15.² Lamentations i. 4, ii. 20, iv. 7, 8, 20.³ Lamentations i. 5, 14, iv. 12, 13.⁴ Lamentations iii. 22.

Jeremiah mourned in common with all the rest ; for he loved his people passionately, and his heart was torn with anguish by the misery into which they were plunged. At Ramah he had seen the troops of captives led away to a distant land amidst heart-rending lamentations, and when he thought of that sad scene he cried,¹ with a reference to Rachel's tomb which stood at Ramah, " Thus says Yahweh : A voice goes up from Ramah, of bitter weeping and lamentation. Rachel is mourning over her sons and refuses to be comforted, because they are no more. But thus says Yahweh : Weep not nor wail so bitterly, for the blessed fruits of your suffering shall surely come, and your children shall return from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your posterity, and your sons shall come back to their land." Even before the fall of Jerusalem he had been permitted to reveal the prospect of Judah's restoration and the establishment of Yahweh's kingdom, and now his god commanded him to write down all that he had then uttered in the hearing of some few only. He had been compelled formerly to provide against any risk of misunderstanding by accompanying every joyful prophecy with the emphatic declaration that the immediate future was dark beyond measure, but now that the night had come he need qualify his words of comfort no longer. " The time will come, says Yahweh, when I shall raise up a righteous scion of the house of David, who shall reign in prosperity and shall maintain justice in the land. Then shall Israel and Judah be redeemed and dwell in safety; and he shall be called by this name : ' Yahweh our righteousness ! ' In those days they shall no more swear by Yahweh who brought Israel out of Egypt, but by Yahweh who brought Israel back from all the countries of the earth to his own land." ²

What a joy it must have been to Jeremiah, after denouncing his people for some forty years, to be permitted at last

¹ Jeremiah xxxi. 15—17.

² Jeremiah xxiii. 5, 6—8.

to console them! Hitherto he had always destroyed, but now he was building up. Hitherto he had seen nothing but faces of terror or indignation as he spoke, now he could wake his people's dying hopes and trace reviving courage in the looks of those he cheered. How we long to see him spending the rest of his days in peace as his people's comforter, and departing in the joyous expectation that Jerusalem would be rebuilt!

But alas! the days of peace which Judah now enjoyed were few.

Four or five years had passed since the devastation of Jerusalem, when some officers, amongst whom was a certain Johanan, came to Gedaliah and told him that the king of Ammon had incited Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, a descendant of the ex-royal family of Judah, to murder him. Johanan recommended him to make away with Ishmael secretly, and so avoid more serious mischief. But Gedaliah put no faith in the accusation.

He soon learned to his cost that he had been too unsuspecting. Johanan was right. Ishmael was indeed plotting against the governor's life. What his motive may have been we cannot tell. Did his own royal blood make him resent Gedaliah's appointment as governor? Was he urged on by the dream of Yahweh's redeeming Israel by his hand, and restoring the kingdom of his forefather David? To us such an expectation seems monstrous, and so indeed it was. But fanaticism is blind; and the prophet Ezekiel teaches us¹ that there really were inhabitants of the desolated Judah who had strung themselves up to the belief reflected in their cry: "If Abraham, who was but one, inherited this land, why should not we, who are so many, receive it likewise?" And the prophet's only answer was: "Do you think to

¹ Ezekiel xxxiii. 24—29.

receive the land as an inheritance while you eat food with the blood in it and serve idols, while you pour out blood and practise violence, and commit adultery? Of a truth Yahweh will smite the inhabitants with the sword, or give them up to the beasts of prey, and slay those who hide themselves in caves by the pestilence, till the land is bereft of its people and all men know that Yahweh, and none other, has laid it waste, because of all the sins of the people." These words of the prophet are but another proof of the very small influence exercised upon a seer's anticipations for the future by considerations of ordinary prudence and common sense, and show how completely all else was dominated by his conception of the religious conditions of the problem. Ezekiel does not say that it would be the height of folly to rise against a foe that would be as a hundred to one, but simply that the inhabitants of Judæa are too wicked to deserve the land as a possession. It was not at all out of the question, therefore, for these people themselves, who were not conscious of being so utterly godless, to anticipate success in a rebellion.

But whatever may have moved this Ishmael to his conspiracy its effect was simply to plunge the country into misery; nor did he himself reap any fruits from it. In the seventh month—we are not told the year—perhaps on occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles, Ishmael came with ten officers to visit Gedaliah at Mizpah. He met with a hospitable reception, and in return he murdered the unsuspecting governor, together with his adherents and the Chaldæan garrison. Then he closed the city gates to keep the affair secret, enticed a caravan of eighty pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem from northern Israel within the walls, and slew them all except ten, who bought their lives by disclosing certain pits filled with provisions. At last he fled to the land of the Ammonites, taking with him the princesses and other distinguished Jews from Mizpah. But meanwhile the news

had spread in spite of Ishmael's precautions; Johanan pursued him, he was almost completely deserted, and finally escaped with only eight companions.

So the fruits of his crime eluded him, while the mischief he had done his country was irreparable. Johanan and his followers, together with all the people of Mizpah whom they had rescued from the power of Ishmael, were afraid of remaining in the country after what had happened, for they feared the Chaldeans would inflict a fierce revenge upon the innocent, since the guilty were no longer to be found. So they set out at once for Egypt.

But when they came to Bethlehem they paused. It was so hard to leave their fatherland! The chiefs came to Jeremiah, who had doubtless been one of those carried off by Ishmael, and besought him to pray for them and consult Yahweh. Jeremiah consented, and promised to tell them faithfully all that Yahweh should reveal; while they, on their side, solemnly promised to obey the word of Yahweh, whether with or against their own desires.

Ten whole days Jeremiah waited for a revelation from his god. This is far from unnatural. It was a matter of extreme difficulty to decide upon the wisest course; and though Jeremiah was firmly persuaded that he was waiting for a direct revelation from Yahweh, what he really had to do was to form a decided opinion of his own. This time of suspense and indecision must have been extremely painful to him. He was doubtless in deep depression. His hopes for the immediate future had been dashed to the ground at a single stroke. Gedaliah's mournful end, which he had foreseen as little as anyone, was a heavy blow to him. What was to be done now? There was but too good cause to fear the Chaldeans; but, on the other hand, the prophet cherished the profound conviction that Yahweh would protect the innocent.

This latter consideration finally prevailed. Jeremiah had recovered from the shock and was himself again. He called Johanan and the rest before him, and commanded them, in Yahweh's name, to remain in the land and not to flee to Egypt. Yahweh, he said, would take pity on them and defend them against the wrath of the king of Babylon. He further declared, with vehement emphasis, that if they disobeyed Yahweh and fled to Egypt, famine and pestilence would pursue them there, and they would be plunged into a sea of misery.

The stress which he laid upon this portion of his oracle makes us suspect that he had reason to know how strongly his advice was opposed to the wishes of his comrades, who had of course been considering the matter themselves during all these days. The answer they gave to Jeremiah revealed at once how widely their conclusion differed from his. They denounced him as a liar, and said he had invented the oracle himself, at the instigation of his friend Baruch, who was a traitor, and intended to put them all into the power of the Chaldeans.

Baruch had in all probability given them good grounds for suspecting his influence in the production of Jeremiah's oracle. He had always been true to Jeremiah in every trial and danger, and there can be no question that he was a man of lofty character and deep and earnest faith. We may also infer that he was not of a passionate and impulsive nature, for he does not appear to have been susceptible of the prophetic furor. Such a man would probably be less completely crushed by what had happened, and would retain more even self-possession than the fiery Jeremiah. His faith in Yahweh's protecting care did not desert him. We may take for granted that during these ten days he frequently conversed with Jeremiah, and strove to dispel his master's gloom and depression. The oracle which finally resulted

from Jeremiah's deliberations was therefore really, to some extent, the work of Baruch; and since the latter had no doubt already expressed himself in the same sense to others, his influence was naturally recognised in Jeremiah's response. Now in those days people could hardly understand that different men might hold exactly opposite convictions in equally good faith, so they denounced Jeremiah as a forger of lies and Baruch as a traitor.

Jeremiah was pronounced a lying prophet, but nevertheless his companions thought it a matter of great importance to have him with them still, and accordingly they carried him off to Egypt, where we shall soon meet him again.

Jeremiah had spoken in faith when he said: "Yahweh will protect you if you remain in the land;" but the result proved the conduct of his terrified countrymen in rejecting his counsel and seeking refuge abroad to be quite as sensible as his own advice, for we learn that five years after the devastation of Jerusalem Nebuchadrezzar again carried off many hundred Judæans into captivity.¹ That he did so because of Gedaliah's murder is not certain, since the month only and not the year of that event is given,² and we cannot therefore compare the dates, but it is highly probable that the deportation was the consequence of the murder. It might have been foreseen; for the king of Babylon could never allow his governor and the garrison he commanded to be murdered unavenged. Such a deed amounted to rebellion, and it was quite in the spirit of the times to hold the people in general, many of whom had doubtless conspired with Ishmael, responsible for what had occurred, and to inflict a corresponding punishment.

Judæa was accordingly chastised once more. The most distinguished and able inhabitants were carried away, and

¹ Jeremiah lii. 30.

² Jeremiah xli. 1; 2 Kings xxv. 25.

thus the exaggerated statement of the book of Kings,¹ made with reference to an earlier occasion, that none but the poorest of the people had been left to till the fields and vineyards, was gradually fulfilled almost to the letter. The land was nearly depopulated. Beasts of prey began to multiply. The border districts were seized by the neighbouring peoples. The Edomites in particular appropriated a great part of the territory of Judah. To rebuild Jerusalem was out of the question. There were so few inhabitants in the district now that the very altar of the temple was left in fragments, and jackals dwelt amongst the ruins of the former capital.²

We must not think of Judæa, however, as an absolutely desolated wilderness. There were men still left in it who not only worked for their bread, but cherished their own thoughts, hopes, and fears, and still honoured Yahweh. Indeed, we possess a poem which may be attributed with high probability to one of those still left behind after the third deportation. It is the fifth elegy in the book of Lamentations. The poet mourns over the long continuance of Judah's misery: "Why shouldst thou utterly forget us, O Yahweh, and forsake us for so long time?"³ and complains of being oppressed by "servants,"⁴ which can hardly be a reference to Gedaliah. All this appears to indicate a date after the third and final chastisement. The whole poem is a bitter lamentation over the mournful condition of the land and all its inhabitants, and closes with the prayer:⁵

Bring us back to thyself and restore us, O Yahweh!

Renew our days as of old.

For why shouldst thou utterly forsake us,

And be wrath with us beyond measure?

¹ 2 Kings xxv. 12.

² Lamentations v. 18.

³ Lamentations v. 20.

⁴ v. 8.

⁵ Vv. 21, 22.

The hope of a restoration to former splendour, which speaks so faintly in this song, found more powerful utterance in the words of other Judæans. Perhaps we still possess an example of this firmer faith in a prophecy contained in the book of Isaiah (chapters xxiv.—xxvii.), the writer of which most likely lived in Judæa after the final deportation. Unfortunately this discourse is very obscure, and we must admit that we cannot determine with certainty the time or place of its delivery, or rather of its composition.

The prophecy contains one verse, however, which we must not pass over in silence, since it has excited a great deal of interest and attention. It seems to indicate that the man of God who wrote it looked forward to a resurrection of the dead, though we search in vain elsewhere for any indications of such a hope amongst the Israelites till long after the Captivity.¹ The author of this oracle cries in triumph: “Oh that Yahweh’s dead might live, that my corpses might arise! Awake and rejoice ye that dwell in the underworld! For your dew is dew of light, and the shades shall walk on the earth!” The prophet here addresses the shades, and especially those of his countrymen whom he calls “his corpses” and “Yahweh’s dead.” They will live again; for when Yahweh pours out his blessings nothing can be left lifeless. In reading this outpouring, we must bear in mind that the prophet is giving utterance to no general conviction of the age; and, indeed, was himself so far from having attained to any definite conception of a future resurrection, that only a few lines before² he had comforted the Judæans under oppression by the thought that the dead live not again, and the shades arise no more. In his cry, “Oh that the dead might live,” we have an outburst of the heart, a momentary longing of the soul. If in the day of his glory Yahweh of war-hosts “would swallow up death for

¹ Compare Vol. II., pp. 376—381.

² Isaiah xxvi. 19.

³ v. 14.

ever, wipe the tears out of every eye, and take away his people's sorrow from all the earth,"¹ oh ! that he would but raise the dead of his people to life again ! Thus understood, the verse is very remarkable, as the first instance of a pious Israelite being swept in the fervour of his prophetic utterance into the expression of a longing that the pious dead might rise again.

This oracle predicts the fall of a mighty city that had oppressed Judah, and announces the future glory of Israel ; and if, as we have supposed, it was uttered in Judah and during the Captivity, it certainly cannot date from the early years of that period, for then the prophets must have held their peace in shame, and the pressure of immediate necessities was too great to admit of such high-wrought expectations.

The remnant of the people, broken and impoverished, were compelled to earn their scant and painful subsistence under foreign governors, and to pay tribute also. But half a century later, when a little prosperity was here and there restored, the stir amongst the Babylonian exiles must have produced an effect in Judah too, and waked a corresponding hope in many a bosom there.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EXILES.

JEREMIAH XLIII. 7b—XLIV. ; PSALMS CXXXVII., XIV.,² XC.

THE Judæans were now scattered in every quarter under heaven. No doubt a considerable number of families had left the country upon Nebuchadrezzar's first approach. Subsequently to the first two deportations some of these fugitives had returned, partly out of love of their father-

¹ Isaiah xxv. 8.

² Psalms liii.

land and partly because they were exposed in other countries to the very same dangers they had left Canaan to escape. But now that Gedaliah had been murdered and Judæa depopulated for the third time we may be sure that there were few who ventured to return. All alike saw the necessity of yielding to fate, though submission must have been fraught with far more suffering to some than to others. And while many settled down in the foreign land and were gradually assimilated by the people of the place, others preserved their nationality.

Concerning some few groups of the voluntary or involuntary exiles we can still recover certain details.

First, let us turn our attention to Egypt, whither, we may be sure, numbers of Judæans had already fled before Jeremiah's terrified companions sought a refuge there on Gedaliah's murder. This latter band of fugitives arrived at Taphanes or Daphne, a city on the borders of Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them, although they had thrown his counsel to the winds and declared him a deceiver. At Daphne the prophet could not refrain from uttering the word of his god once more. He illustrated his oracle by a symbolical action, taking some large stones and burying them in the ground in the open space before the royal palace, and then denouncing Egypt as follows: "Thus says Yahweh, I will bring Nebuchadrezzar to this place, and he shall pitch his tent above these stones, and shall smite Egypt, and shall burn the temples of the idols with fire and then go back again unscathed."

This was not a very friendly return for the hospitality which he and his companions received; but we need not wonder that the preacher of repentance, carried to Egypt against his will, and more afflicted than any of the others by the idolatry he was forced to witness, indulged in anything but gentle feelings towards the land in which he found himself.

Rather than condemn his harshness, let us admire his invincible determination! He was still resolved to speak. After preaching for nearly half a century he had been denounced by his countrymen as a liar, and carried off to a country in which he was deeply convinced that nothing but misery awaited him. Surely, to go on preaching to these men in the same strain as before must have appeared a hopeless task, if ever there was one; and yet he persevered unhesitatingly in his course, though the chasm between himself and the Judæan refugees was growing wider and wider.

How wide it was appeared especially on occasion of a general conference of Judæans from every part of Egypt. They came not only from the frontier towns of Daphne and Migdol, but from Noph or Memphis, and Pathros, which appears to mean Upper Egypt. They met to consider their common interests, and it appears that the question of going back to Canaan was raised and discussed by them; at any rate, Jeremiah himself mentions their hearty desire to return.¹

This assembly was greeted by Jeremiah with the usual denunciation. He reminded the Judæans of the mournful past, and gave his well-known explanation of it, namely, that Manasseh's idolatries, which had driven Yahweh to the irrevocable decree to chastise his people, were the chief cause of Judah's misery.² If only they had learnt repentance at last! But alas! they were the same as ever, and still served the idols. The prophet attacked the women with more especial energy, for the worship of the Queen of Heaven had been very common amongst them formerly, and was now reviving. He ended his discourse by declaring that so far from returning to Canaan all these godless ones should perish wretchedly.

Hardly had he ceased when he was overwhelmed with a

¹ Jeremiah xliv. 14.

² Compare Vol. III., p. 403.

volley of retorts, especially from the women, who pleaded that they had not worshipped the Queen of Heaven without the knowledge of their husbands, so that if there was any harm in it the latter were as guilty as themselves. But they were far from admitting that there was any harm in it. Nay, experience urged them to continue the practice; for as long as Judah had worshipped Astarte there had been peace and plenty in the land, and all their misery dated from the neglect of her service.

So even amongst the Judæans, whose heart still cleaved to the fatherland, the heathen school could raise its head unabashed! No wonder. If the result was really to decide which conception of religion was the best, then the heathenising party was right; for the triumph of the Mosaic principles had marked the beginning of Judah's woe. But we of course cannot accept this verdict, for we do not regard Judah's disasters as the punishment of either Manasseh's or Josiah's religious practices. On the other hand we respect Jeremiah and those who agreed with him for holding fast by their religion even when the event seemed to disprove its efficacy; for it shows that their faith did not really rest upon an inference from the course of events, but was supported by their hearts and consciences even in the face of the most grievous disappointments. But we need not wonder that the Judæans who had fled to Egypt threw the result of Josiah's reformation in the prophet's teeth, and that he could find no answer that convinced them. He simply repeated his assertions and his threats more vehemently than ever, but without result.—We cannot say whether his prophecy, that King Hophra would meet the same fate at the hands of Nebuchadrezzar as had already overtaken Zedekiah, was ever fulfilled or not.

Nor can we tell how long Jeremiah went on working in Egypt. If the last chapter in the book called after him were

really from his hand, it would show that he was still living in the thirty-seventh year of Jehoiakin's captivity, and therefore lived at least twenty-two years in Egypt. But since this chapter is not his, we are entirely without means of knowing how long he remained there. He was very old, however, when he came, and we may well suppose that his exile was of short duration, and that he soon laid down his weary head in rest.

One or two of the Ecclesiastical Fathers tell us that he was stoned to death by the Judæans; but a tradition of so late a date affords us no safe basis of belief. In an age when the crown of martyrdom was actually coveted by many Christians, and was regarded by all as a sure pledge of the inheritance of heavenly bliss, it seemed a natural supposition that so great a prophet as Jeremiah must have fallen at the hands of his foes. It is highly improbable, however, that that this was really his end. The Jews had so thoroughly learned the art of respecting the preacher and disregarding his preaching that Jeremiah ran little personal risk. We are safe in picturing him amongst his countrymen and yet almost alone, filled with intensest interest in the fate of the Judæans and yet ever more and more estranged from them, honoured as a man of God and yet never obeyed or even really understood. Though he looked at the dark side of everything, and was shocked and grieved by all his surroundings, he did not die at last uncheered by hope. Yahweh would raise up Israel again. He could not reject his people for ever. Even from amongst these wicked Judæans whom he saw around him in Egypt, some, though only few, would return to Canaan, and all would learn that he, Jeremiah, had preached the word of Yahweh in truth.¹

How great a name he had amongst the Jews of a later generation we shall see hereafter, and it is probable that

¹ Jeremiah xliv. 14, 28.

the very men in whose midst he had spent the closing years of his life honoured him highly after his death. This respect was doubtless shared by the disciples of the heathen school, for though they refused to relinquish the service of other gods at the command of a prophet of Yahweh, they nevertheless regarded him as a holy man. The adherents of the Mosaic school, however, were numerous in Egypt, for since the reformation of Josiah they had constituted the great majority of the nation; and it was more especially by them that Jeremiah was held in honour. For them his mission had assuredly not been fruitless. Though they only half adopted his gloomy views, and yet had not the strength to believe as he did in Judah's future, still they were faithful to their god, and half a century or more afterwards they doubtless did their part in effecting the restoration of the Jewish state.

Let us now transport ourselves from Egypt to Babylonia, whither on three occasions Nebuchadrezzar had transported bands of Judeans. Of Jehoiakin's companions, but of them alone, we know the destination rather more particularly. We find them settled on the banks of the Chebar or Chaboras,¹ a river that empties itself into the Euphrates, not far from Circesium; but when the Chaldæan prince, upon two subsequent occasions, determined to transport thousands of Judeans from their country, he would naturally assign them some other dwelling place, for if these turbulent vassals had all been settled together, they might soon have endangered the tranquillity of the kingdom. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that though Ezekiel tells us how he received the news of Jerusalem's fall,² he never mentions the arrival of any fresh bands of exiles. We are therefore left in ignorance of the destination of Zedekiah's fellow-

¹ Ezekiel i. 1—3.

² Ezekiel xxxiii. 21.

captives, and of those who were carried away after Gedaliah's murder. We are by no means bound to suppose that they were all taken with the booty to Babylon itself, as Zedekiah was. Indeed, this is highly improbable. What should Nebuchadrezzar want with all these malcontents in and about his capital? He had transported others of his subjects besides the Judæans; and, since a great proportion of his immeasurable kingdom consisted of provinces which had been conquered after bloody wars, there was no lack of depopulated districts to which he could transfer them.

We must therefore suppose that in three or more portions of the kingdom, perhaps far removed from each other, thinly-populated districts were assigned to the Judæans, just as the territory of Israel itself had formerly been made over by the Assyrian princes to colonies of their subjects transported from elsewhere. The Judæans therefore were not slaves, but were put into a position in which they could earn their bread and even rise to prosperity, if only they could make up their minds to keep quiet; and when we read of a certain prophet named Ahab, "whom the king of Babylon roasted at the fire,"¹ we are safe in supposing that he incurred his fate by his own seditious conduct. But of course the Judæans were subject to Chaldæan governors, who were doubtless often guilty of extortion, and treated the exiles with a severity which gave them only too good cause to complain of oppression,² though the weight of these sufferings would vary in different places. In general the exiles enjoyed as much freedom as they could have expected in their own land after its conquest by Nebuchadrezzar. They were permitted to build houses, cultivate lands, plant vineyards, and engage in commerce, and were left in undisturbed intercourse with each other and the free exercise of their religion. They even had their own elders and nobles, who watched over their common

¹ Jeremiah xxix. 21, 22.

² Isaiah xlii. 22, xlvii. 6, li. 23.

interests and decided their disputes ; and it was probably not long before they recognised a common head, who represented them at court. At any rate we find an arrangement of this kind in full operation at a later date.

The fortunate turn in Jehoiakin's fate¹ proves that in some cases captives were treated with marked favour by the Chaldean princes. When Jehoiakin had sighed in captivity for thirty-seven years he was released by king Evil-merodach, and was honoured above all the other deposed monarchs who were in the palace at Babylon, for he ate at the king's table till the day of his death. In him, therefore, his former subjects would find an influential advocate in time of need.

The Judæans who found a dwelling place in Asia were the brethren of those who settled in Egypt, and we cannot wonder to see the heathen school raising its head amongst the former as well as the latter. The same views which led the exiles in Egypt to honour the Queen of Heaven induced those on the banks of the Chebar and elsewhere to sacrifice their children to Molech, to make stone and wooden images of gods, and, in a word, to assimilate their own worship as nearly as possible to that of other peoples. The discourses of Ezekiel place it beyond doubt that none of these practices were rare amongst the exiles.²

Yet the Mosaic school retained its supremacy here also, and gave triumphant proof of its vital strength. The views of the heathen school concerning the past : " All our misery is due to the neglect of the worship of Astarte, Molech, and Baal," were forced to yield to those of the Mosaic party : " All the people's misery is the result of its desertion of Yahweh, and especially of its worship of strange gods and images." This became the only accepted and orthodox inter-

¹ 2 Kings xxv. 27—30 ; Jeremiah lii. 31—34.

² Ezekiel xvi. 20, 21, xx. 30, 31, xxiii. 37—39.

pretation of Israel's history, and we may still see how its details were worked out in the recast of the old traditions which was made during the Captivity, and which we now possess in various historical books of the Old Testament. A word more on this subject.

In speaking of the book of Deuteronomy,¹ we remarked that the first four chapters and some of the concluding ones formed no part of the book of law discovered by Hilkiah, but were subsequently added to it. Now this introduction and conclusion, which imply the people's misery as a present fact, were written in the early years of the Captivity, or perhaps even before the devastation of the city and the temple; and the hand of their author may be constantly traced throughout the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The question of how these books were put together is a very complicated one, and in many respects is still unsolved; but it is certain, at any rate, as we have frequently observed already,² that the view they take of the past conforms throughout to that of Deuteronomy. They represent the whole history of Israel as a succession of departures from Yahweh's law, followed by repentance and conversion. First comes Moses with the law of Deuteronomy, the observance of which is maintained by Joshua; but hardly has the latter closed his eyes when the people desert Yahweh and serve other gods. The consequence is that they are plunged into misery and then repent, but only for a time. Samuel, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah are the great names upon which the writer loves to dwell, while he notes with pain that even pious kings like Asa and Jehoshaphat did not remove the *bamahs*.³ The captivity of northern Israel was due to the sin of Jeroboam, and the fall of Judah to

¹ See Vol. III., p. 435.

² See Vol. II., pp. 130, 131, 142 ff., 325; Vol. III., pp. 98, 108 f., 113, 132 f.

³ 1 Kings xv. 14, xxii. 43.

Manasseh's idolatry. The historian pictures all pious men of whatever period as clad in the costume of his own age, and seeks the cause of every disaster in the worship of strange gods and images.

This is a very inadequate view to take, and shows that the writer's knowledge of the past was extremely defective; but it makes us thoroughly acquainted with his own religious ideas. He differs widely from the greatest prophets, who would have given far more prominence to the moral demands of Yahweh. He belongs to the Mosaic school, it is true, but displays the strong priestly tendencies already discernible in Josiah's reformation.

The favourable reception amongst the exiles which has secured the preservation of these books shows that the writer was not alone in his conception of the people's history, but wrote in a spirit shared by many, and found a ready echo for his words.

The Mosaic school, then, survived the shock which the people's sufferings after Josiah's reformation and the fall of the city and temple brought upon it. Its victory over the heathenising party was decisive.

Had the remnant of Israel gone over to the heathen school it must inevitably have melted into the tribes amongst which it was placed; but since the followers of Moses had succeeded in impressing the stamp of their religious convictions upon the hearts of the exiles, the continued existence of an Israelite nationality was secured, and a restoration of the people rendered possible. But this very circumstance aggravated the sufferings of the exiles. Not only did their religious zeal and their love for everything Israelitish tend to bring them into collision with the authorities, and so expose them to oppression, but they were never able to feel at home in the strange land, and perpetually yearned for their own

country ; for however well off they may have been in many respects in the land of their exile, their hearts still clung to Canaan and to Sion, where Yahweh dwelt. This is touchingly expressed in the opening verses of the following poem,¹ which was composed after the return from captivity, and breathes the remembrance of past sufferings, together with a fierce spirit of vengeance upon Israel's foes :—

By the rivers of Babylon we sat down
 And wept when we thought of Sion ;
 We hanged our harps on the willows.
 For our foes required a song from us,
 Our tormentors a strain of joy :
 "Sing us one of your Sion-songs !"
 How can we sing one of Yahweh's songs in a land of
 strangers ?
 If I forget thee, Jerusalem, may my hand forget every
 strain of the harp,²
 May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I
 remember thee not
 And exalt not Jerusalem above my supremest joy !
 O Yahweh ! remember Edom's sons,
 How they cried in the day of Jerusalem's fall :
 "Cast it down, cast it down to the very foundations !"
 O daughter of Babylon, thou destroyer !
 Blessed be he who requites thee for what thou hast
 done to us !
 Blessed be he who seizes thy little ones and dashes
 them against the rocks !

Poets often find inspiration in the extremity of grief, and many poems were doubtless composed amongst the exiles, while some at least were afterwards taken into the collection of psalms. But since these poems were in many cases worked

¹ Psalm cxxxvii.

² After an amended version.

over afterwards, in order to adapt them to the altered circumstances of the people, or make them suitable for use in the temple service, they are now very difficult to recognise. There are some of our psalms, however, the origin of which may be assigned with considerable probability to the period of the Captivity. Such, for example, is a poem which appears twice in our collection, with slight modifications,¹ and runs as follows :—

Fools say to themselves that there is no God ;
 Their lives are evil and hateful,
 Not one of them does well.
 Yahweh looks down from heaven upon the children of
 men,
 To see whether no one is wise
 And fears God ;
 But all are perverse and corrupt together ;
 Not one does well,
 Not one !
 Then have these ill-doers no sense,
 That they devour my people
 And live at ease without calling on Yahweh ?²
 They are afterwards filled with terror
 Because God dwells with the righteous.
 The plans of the oppressed you will never frustrate,³
 For Yahweh is his refuge.
 Oh that Israel's salvation would come forth from Sion,
 That Yahweh would bring back his banished people !
 Then would Jacob rejoice
 And Israel be glad.

When the poet of this song poured out his heart, it was the impiety of others, whether apostate Israelites or heathens, that weighed upon his mind ; but a deep tone of sadness,

¹ Psalms xiv. and lili.

² Doubtful translation.

³ The translation is very doubtful.

coupled with a personal sense of guilt, breathes through the following poem, which is described in the superscription as "a prayer of Moses, the man of God :"¹

Lord ! thou hast been our refuge for all generations.
Ere the mountains were born or the earth brought
forth,

From eternity to eternity thou art God.
Thou bringest back man into nothingness,
And sayest : " Return, ye children of men ! "
For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday
when it passes,

As a single watch of the night.
Men are like to a dream,²
Like the grass of the morning :
In the morning fresh and blooming,
In the evening parched and withered ;
For we are consumed by thine anger
And vanish before thy wrath.
Thou rememberest our trespasses
And dost set our secret sins in the sight of thy
countenance.

Our days pass by in thy wrath ;
We spend our years like a thought.
The number of our years is three score and ten,
Or, should it run high, four score.
And its pride³ is labour and sorrow,
For it passes swiftly and we flee away !
Yet we learn not the might of thy wrath,
Thine anger that should make thee feared.
Teach us so to number our days
That we may devote a wise heart to thee.

¹ Psalm xc.

² The translation is very doubtful.

³ Doubtful translation.

Return, O Yahweh ! How long shall it be ?
 Repent that thou hast deserted thy servants !
 Satisfy us in the morning with thy grace,
 Let us rejoice and be glad every day !
 Let thy work appear unto thy servants
 And thy glory unto their children.
 Let the grace of Yahweh, our god, be upon us !
 Establish the work of our hands for us,
 Yea, establish the work of our hands !

CHAPTER IX.

EZEKIEL.

EZEKIEL I.—III. 21, XX. 1—44, XXXVII. 1—14, XL.—XLVIII.

WHEN examining the spirit in which Israel's history was studied during the Captivity, we perceived that a strong priestly tinge had come over the Mosaic school, and that the worship of strange gods and images excited more indignation than immorality did. We see this priestly tendency taking a still distincter shape in the activity of the prophet Ezekiel.

This man had himself been a Levitical priest in the temple of Jerusalem, and was therefore well acquainted with all the arrangements of the sanctuary and everything that took place in it. When Jehoiakin was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadrezzar, Ezekiel was amongst the Judæans compelled to leave their country for the banks of the Chebar. Five years afterwards he felt the prophetic call, but restrained himself for some time. How he supported himself and his family, for he was a married man, we do not know; but he had a house of his own, and was often consulted there by the "elders" of the Judæans about him, when they wanted an oracle.

In many respects he worked upon the lines laid down by Jeremiah, and experienced treatment very similar to his. He was honoured and consulted as the messenger of Yahweh, but was never believed; for the exiles lent a more ready ear to the prophets who announced the rescue of Jerusalem and the return of the exiles to their fatherland than to the preacher of repentance who foretold nothing but disaster.

Like every prophet of earlier and later times he had to complain that people often came to hear him out of mere curiosity. His neighbours regarded him "as a minstrel with a beautiful voice and a skilful hand." He was convinced that his preaching was in vain, and could only comfort himself with the thought that one day, when his words were accomplished, these people would confess that a true prophet had been amongst them.¹

Ezekiel did not confine his attention to Israel any more than Jeremiah did, but fixed his eyes upon every nation with which his people had come into contact, threatening them also with Yahweh's judgments. But Israel's future was always his chief centre of interest.

We learn the general drift of his prophetic efforts, which extended over at least two and twenty years,² from the book of his oracles; but in his case, far more than in Jeremiah's even, we must be on our guard against accepting the written account of his prophecies as a simple record of what he had actually said. It was not until twenty-five years after his banishment, or twenty years after his prophetic call, that he began to write his book. At that distance of time it would have been impossible for him to reproduce exactly what he had said on every separate occasion, even had he desired to do so; but it is evident from the book itself that he had no such intention; for, though he sometimes mentions

¹ Ezekiel xxxiii. 31—33.

² Compare Ezekiel i. 2 with xxix. 17.

the time and occasion of his preaching, it is obvious that the majority of his discourses were never spoken at all, but only written, for his symbolical actions are of such a nature that they can never have been really performed, and his visions are so complex that they cannot have been actually seen!

As a specimen, let us examine the vision of his call.

He tells us that he once perceived a huge mass of clouds borne down from the north amidst the howling of the storm-wind, while flashes of lightning darted from it athwart each other, and the whole was surrounded by light, while the centre glittered like gold. Then, from this mass of clouds came forth a group of four creatures, which looked like men in front, but had four faces each—a man's face in front, a lion's to the right, a bull's to the left, and an eagle's behind. Moreover, they had each four wings, with two of which they covered their bodies, while the points of the other two met above their heads. Their legs were straight, and from under their wings came hands, as of men. When they moved or changed their direction they did not turn round, but went straight forward wherever they would. The creatures themselves shone like fire, and between them was a light like that of a heap of glowing coals. The whole apparition darted hither and thither like a flash of lightning.

And behold! there was a wheel attached to each of these animals. It was so on all four sides. Each wheel was of wondrous form, like a wheel within a wheel, all glittering with light, and the felloes were full of eyes. These wheels went up and down, and backwards and forwards, with the creatures themselves. They were inseparable from each other, for the spirit of the animals was in the wheels also. Now, above the heads of the animals was a canopy that glittered like crystal, the lower surface of which was touched by the wings of the animals. When all was in motion the rush of the wings made a sound like a bursting flood, like the voice of

the Almighty, like the shout of war; but when all was still the animals dropped their wings. Above this canopy was something like a throne, sending out beams as from sapphire stones, and upon it sat one in form like a man, shining like gold from the hips upwards, but not so bright below. Round the whole was a shining splendour like a rainbow. Such was the form of Yahweh's glory!

When I saw this sight, says Ezekiel, I fell down upon my face in reverence; and, as I lay there, I heard the words: "Son of man, stand up, and I will speak to you!" Then I took courage to stand up, and I heard these words addressed to me: "Son of man, I send thee to Israel, to that people that rebels against me as did its forefathers, to that intractable generation! Not that they will listen to you and amend their ways, but they must be taught that a prophet is in their midst. Be not afraid of them, O son of man! nor be thou terrified by all their words, for I give thee power to sit upon thorns and to tread upon scorpions. Speak my words to these rebellious ones. Harken, O son of man!" continued Yahweh, "and be not disobedient as Israel is: Open thy mouth and eat up this!" And behold there was a book-roll in the hand that he stretched out to me, and he unrolled it before me. It was written full on both sides with wailings and lamentations.

In obedience to the divine command I ate this book-roll, with which I was to fill myself, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. Before he departed from me he said again: "Son of man! I send you not to a people of barbarian tongue, but to Israel. Yet they will not listen to you, for all Israel has a face of brass and a heart of stone. But I will give thee a face of brass like theirs. Be not afraid of them."

Hardly had he spoken when a whirlwind seized me, and I heard behind me the awful thunder that goes with Yahweh on his way, and I heard the sound of those wings which

touched each other and of those wheels—a mighty rushing sound!

My heart was bitter when the hand of Yahweh was upon me, and I was borne to the exiles at Tel-abib on the Chebar, but for seven whole days I could not speak. Then Yahweh's word came to me again: "Son of man! I have appointed you watchman over the house of Israel; receive from my mouth the words with which to exhort them in my name. If I say of the wicked man that he shall die, and you tell him not, then if he dies because of his sin I shall require his blood at your hands. But if you have warned him and he has not repented, you are free from guilt. So too if a good man fall into sin, and I lay a stumbling block in his way, then if you do not warn him he shall die for his sin, his former virtue shall not save him, and you too shall be reckoned guilty. But if you warn him and he repents, then shall his life be spared and you too shall deliver yourself."

It is clear enough that this representation of "Yahweh riding on the cherubs" is not a vision in the proper sense of the word, for the prophet cannot really have seen such a thing even in a state of spiritual exaltation. It is an artificial piece of symbolism. The meaning of every detail is far from clear. The cherubs were perhaps originally thunder-clouds, and their primitive significance is not forgotten in this vision, though greatly modified and overlaid with other thoughts which push it into the background. The eyes on the felloes of the wheels and the faces of the four animals may safely be taken as representing certain attributes of God—the eyes standing for omniscience, the human face for understanding, the eagle for immortality, the lion for strength, the bull perhaps for productive power. The peculiarity in the whole apparition in never turning, but moving direct towards all the four quarters of heaven, must signify that everything lies open before Yahweh's face at every moment.

But after all we are groping about in the twilight with these conjectures, since we cannot tell the sources from which the prophet derived his imagery. The emblematic figures introduced into the temple at Jerusalem by the Phoenicians were no more distinctively Israelitish than the griffins which Ezekiel might probably see in the Babylonian temples.

We learn from this description of Yahweh, enthroned on the cherubs, how powerfully such symbolical representations appealed to the hearts of ancient peoples. In many respects their function was analogous to that now taken in the Christian and other churches by philosophical definitions of the nature of God. People were guided less by thought and argument than by feeling and imagination. Images of bulls, flower-buds, pomegranates, palm trees, heads of eagles and griffins, worked upon the feelings by means of the imagination.

But whatever may be the meaning of the several features of the apparition described by Ezekiel, its main significance is obvious. Yahweh is an exalted, unapproachable, terrific god. From the thunder-cloud, the lightning-flash, the lurid glow of fire, the only fit comparisons with his countenance are drawn. Accordingly when the prophet saw him he fell down in consternation. We know already how thoroughly consonant all this is with the Israelitish ideal,¹ and Ezekiel evidently felt most profoundly how far the "son of man," as Yahweh generally calls him, was separated from the Holy One. Yet he did not shrink from representing Yahweh in the human form sitting upon a throne, with the upper part of his body shining like gold, and the lower part, doubtless because enveloped in a garment, glowing less brightly.

Elsewhere, too, Ezekiel gives us similar descriptions of Yahweh's glory. Once, he tells us,² as he sat at home in the

¹ Compare, for instance, Vol. I., pp. 159 ff.; Vol. II., pp. 100 ff.; Vol. III., pp. 328 ff.

² Ezekiel viii.—x.

company of the most distinguished Judæans, a fiery human form appeared to him, took hold of his hair with its hand, and so transported him to the temple of Jerusalem to show him all the heathen abominations which were perpetrated there. At the temple he saw the cherubs again, as on the banks of the Chebar, and Yahweh upon the throne. Yahweh then summoned six angels with weapons of destruction, and one with writing materials. Then he rose from his throne above the cherubs and commanded the angel with the pen to mark the foreheads of all the inhabitants of Jerusalem who sighed over the heathen practices, while the other six were to slaughter all who were not marked. Then Yahweh ascended his throne again and commanded the angel who bore the inkhorn to go in amongst the cherubs and take some burning coals from between them and scatter them over the city. When he drew near, one of the cherubs put out his hand and gave him some of the coals. Finally Yahweh was carried away again on the wings of the animals.

Not only in his descriptions of Yahweh's nature, but in his accounts of the sinful past of the Israelites and his predictions of their future, Ezekiel made such free use of symbolical expressions, representations and actions that his enemies called him a riddle-maker, greatly to his indignation.¹ The fact is that all the prophets made use of these emblems, as was only natural; for the truths they had to preach were very limited in number, and they were always hammering on the same anvil: "Repent! or you will perish." Their only chance of arousing and sustaining the interest of their hearers was to clothe their denunciations in fresh forms. We have already noticed some of Jeremiah's strange actions. But unfortunately Ezekiel's taste was anything but pure, and his images are sometimes highly offensive. For instance when he reminds Samaria and Jerusalem of their past and

¹ Ezekiel xx. 49.

foretells their future, addressing them respectively as Aholah, *i.e.*, *her (own) tent*, and Aholibah, *i.e.*, *in her is my tent*, his coarseness is quite revolting; and the forms under which he describes Jerusalem's fall and the sufferings of the exiles are often exceedingly gross.

But however rude his mode of preaching, at any rate he was deeply impressed with the principle he so often announced,¹ that a prophet was responsible for the lives of the deluded and sinful ones to whom he was sent. For he warned everyone he could reach with reiterated emphasis. The flood of reproaches he pours upon his people is sometimes overwhelming. The earlier prophets imagined that at least in the wilderness and in Joshua's days Israel had feared Yahweh; but Ezekiel dated the people's idolatry from their stay in Egypt itself. Even there they had served the gods of the country and refused to listen to Yahweh's voice. Yet he had redeemed his people that his name might not be profaned amongst the heathen. But things had been no better in the desert, nor in Canaan, generation after generation. Even in captivity this sinful people still trod the same evil path!²

The prophet poured out his special wrath upon Jerusalem before it fell. That city of blood had seen so many children sacrificed and was so utterly polluted by all its abominations and idolatries, by sabbath breaking and sacrilege, by theft, murder, adultery, and usury! Its prophets were venal and its priests were sacrilegious. Yahweh would deal with it as with the dross of a smelting furnace, for the whole house of Israel was no better than dross. Yahweh would burn it up in his wrath.³

The judgment was fully deserved and was inevitable, but

¹ Ezekiel iii. 16—21, xxxiii. 1—9.

² Ezekiel xx. 1—32.

³ Ezekiel xxii.

Yahweh's love of Israel was eternal ! This conviction was rooted in Ezekiel's heart, and it urged him to vehement attacks upon the surrounding peoples, such as the Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Philistines, Syrians, Sidonians, and Egyptians.¹ We must not suppose that he took an interest in the fate of these peoples chiefly on their own account, for he regarded them principally in their relations to Israel. Why were the Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, and Philistines to be destroyed? Why was the proud Tyre, especially, to fall? Because they had all rejoiced in Jerusalem's fall, and had helped to compass it!² And why must Egypt fall into the hands of the Chaldeans? In the first place, Israel had vainly relied upon Egypt, and Egypt must therefore be humbled, and, even when restored, must be so weak that Israel would never trust to it again.³ Besides—to take the reason given seventeen years afterwards—Nebuchadrezzar had laboured so hard and suffered so much in the fruitless war against Tyre, which he had undertaken for Yahweh's sake, that he deserved some compensation. Egypt must therefore be his reward.⁴

It need hardly be said that Ezekiel anticipated the return and restoration of the exiles after all these judgments had been executed upon them and upon the heathens. Even before Jerusalem had fallen he cheered his dejected countrymen with these hopes. Israel had always been impious, and yet had always been succoured by his god; for he would not suffer the heathen to argue from the desolate condition of his people that he himself was powerless. Would he suffer them to melt away amongst the heathens now? Not so! But his wrath would burn against the exiles; he would tear them with violence out of the lands in which they dwelt,

¹ Ezekiel xxv.—xxxii., xxxv.

² Ezekiel xxv. 3, 8, 12, 15, xxvi. 2, xxxv. 5, 10, 15, xxxvi. 5.

³ Ezekiel xxix. 1—16.

⁴ Ezekiel xxix. 17—20.

would pronounce sentence upon them in "the desert of the peoples" (probably the Arabian desert), put the contumacious to death, bring back the rest to Canaan and make them prosperous, so that at last they would loath their wickedness and bring acceptable offerings to Yahweh.¹

Rightly to understand the prophet's conception we must observe that the return of the exiles is not the reward of their penitence, as the Captivity was the punishment of their offences; but, on the contrary, their penitence will be the result of their restoration. The prophet, though constantly admonishing his companions, does not in the least reckon upon their flinging away their idols. He builds his hopes solely upon the grace of Yahweh, who cannot desert his people. "Not for your sake," he makes him say,² "not for your sake, O house of Israel, do I deliver you; but for my holy name's sake, which you never cease to profane. It is only to teach the heathen my might that I gather you together and lead you back. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from your wickedness and idolatry. Then will I give you a new heart and a new spirit; I will take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. My spirit will I put within you, and you shall observe my precepts. So shall you dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."

Israel's restoration, as well as his contumacy and the punishment it involved, was represented by Ezekiel under various forms.

Take the following example. Yahweh brought me to a valley that was full of dead men's bones, and led me right round it. Then I saw that it was covered over with men's bones, and that they were very dry. And he said to me: "Son of man! can these bones live?" Then I answered:

¹ Ezekiel xx. 33—44.

² Ezekiel xxxvi. 22—28.

"Lord Yahweh ! thou knowest." Thereupon he commanded me to prophesy concerning them. I did so, and said : "Dry bones ! hearken to the word of Yahweh ! Thus says the lord Yahweh concerning you : Behold I will bring spirit into you and you shall live. I will lay sinews upon you, and make flesh come over you, and will cover you with skin, and pour spirit into you, and you shall live and shall know that I am Yahweh." Hardly had I uttered the words when, hark ! there was a sound, and lo ! the bones were moving and fitting themselves together. Then sinews came over them, and flesh and skin, but as yet there was no spirit in them. Then he told me to prophesy again, and according to his word I cried : "Spirit ! come from the four quarters of heaven and blow upon these slaughtered ones that they may live !" And behold the spirit came into them, and they lived and stood up on their feet, a mighty host. Thereupon Yahweh said to me : "Son of man ! the whole house of Israel is like these bones. They say : 'Our bones are dry ; our hope is frustrated ; we are cut off.' Prophecy, therefore, and say : Thus says Yahweh, I will open your graves and make you come up from them, O my people ! and bring you to the land of Israel and make you live, that you may know that I, Yahweh, have foretold all this and brought it to pass."

Ezekiel, as already observed, was more of a writer than a speaker. At any rate when he wrote his book, towards the end of his life, the time, if there ever was one, in which he yielded to the prophetic inspiration seems to have been passed, for there is much more of the deliberate ingenuity of reflection than the fiery glow of inspiration in his work. Hence the artificial character of his images and visions, to which the simple impressiveness of the one just given forms a favourable exception. Hence, too, the elaborate descriptions of Tyre's grandeur and industry, for example. But

nothing shows more conclusively than his description of the Messianic age how completely deliberate composition had taken the place of the prophetic fire when he wrote. His main idea is identical with that of the elder prophets, to whose words he now and then refers.¹ Israel and Judah, united under the rule of a king of David's house, are to inhabit Canaan² and to become a single people devoted to Yahweh's service. But in many respects Ezekiel takes a course of his own. Thus he describes in great detail³ how almost all the peoples of central Asia (the Chaldees alone are omitted) will take the field together against the Israelites that have returned from the Captivity. He calls these nations Gog and Magog, and likens them to a water-spout; but declares that Yahweh's might will destroy them in such enormous numbers that it will take the Israelites seven years to bury them, during all which time they will need no firewood except the spear-shafts, arrows, bows, and shields they will pick up.

Our attention, however, is more especially attracted by the concluding chapters of Ezekiel's book,⁴ in which he draws a most elaborate picture of the restored Israel. The foremost place in his new Canaan is taken by the temple, which is described in detail, together with its courts, outbuildings, and kitchens, its gables, doors, ornaments, and furniture. The seer devotes especial care to his description of the great altar of burnt offerings and the duties of the servants of the temple. With regard to this latter point he departs slightly from the precepts of Deuteronomy, which assigned the priesthood to all the Levites, whereas Ezekiel distinguishes between "the sons of Zadok," who are the only ones he deems worthy of serving the altar and approaching the holy things, and the other Levites whom he only allows to fill subordinate

¹ Ezekiel xxxviii. 17, xxxix. 8.

² Ezekiel xxxvii. 15—28.

³ Ezekiel xxxviii., xxxix.

⁴ Ezekiel xl.—xlviii.

places about the sanctuary because they had formerly been guilty of idolatry.¹ He insists, above all, that no strangers, no uncircumcised, should do service in the temple, and that the priests should reflect and sustain the sanctity of Yahweh in their dress and their mode of life.

In Ezekiel's ideal state, the city and its suburbs were to surround the temple as before; but henceforth Jerusalem was to be called "Yahweh is there." It was to be enclosed on every side by the possessions of the sons of Zadok and the Levites, which were to be inalienable. Round this consecrated rectangle, in the middle of which the temple would stand, the other tribes were to be ranged in a given order. They were not to have larger or smaller territories according to local and other circumstances, as they had before, for the holy land was to be divided by equi-distant lines into rectangular districts of equal size, one of which was to be assigned to each tribe.

At the head of these tribes the monarch was to stand, the king of the house of David, whose special demesnes would lie between the heritage of Judah and that of Benjamin. The prophet also enumerates the monarch's duties. He must rule in righteousness and practice no extortion, as Israel's nobles had so often done, but must enforce the stated taxes, and ensure a uniform system of weights and measures. The prophet instructs him, with especial emphasis, as to the sacrifices he must bring to Yahweh on week days, on the sabbath, and on sundry feast days. He also gives a detailed account of what the prince is to do on the sabbath, which gate he is to stand before with the people while the priests offer his sacrifice, by which gate he is to enter, and by which to leave the sanctuary.

All this is very paltry. A thoroughly priestly spirit pervades the nine chapters in which Ezekiel sketches his Israel

¹ Compare Vol. III., p. 433.

of the future. Very few verses are devoted to the social interests of the people. It is their religious affairs, or rather all the paltry details of worship, that absorb the seer's attention. His devotion to the temple is curiously illustrated by a passage in which he represents his divine guide as pointing out to him a little stream flowing from under the threshold of the temple at the east side. A thousand cubits further down this stream reached to the ankles of one who crossed it; a thousand cubits further yet it reached to the knees; a thousand more and it rose to the loins; and a thousand further yet it was no longer to be forded. It was a stream the banks of which were well wooded, and the leaves of the trees had healing power and never fell, while the fruits ripened every month and could heal wounds, because the waters by which the trees grew flowed from the sanctuary. Hence, too, the stream was not only full of fish, but when it flowed into the sea it made its waters wholesome, and it brought life wherever it went. Such is the poetical form under which this priest expresses his conviction that all life springs from the sanctuary. Ezekiel has already taken us a great step nearer to the foundation of a priestly state than the law of Deuteronomy did. Not only is the line between priests and laymen sharply drawn, but different ranks are already established amongst the servants of the temple, and the chief business of the Messianic age is the provision for them and the sanctuary. The seer finds room in his picture for the temple kitchens and their hearths, but does not once tell us whether courts of justice, for instance, will exist in the future Israel; or whether agriculture, cattle-breeding, industry, and commerce will flourish! His references to the political and social life of his people are confined to his prescriptions as to the conduct of the prince,—and he is to devote his chief attention to the temple services.

Ezekiel was indeed a priest to the backbone! But he

was a man of firm convictions. In spite of all this priestly trifling, there is something noble about the man that extorts our respect. Living as an exile in a foreign land, in the midst of dejected countrymen who cried, "Our hope is cut off. We are like dry bones!" Ezekiel dared to lay down his plan for the New Canaan, and described how the land of Yahweh's consecrated people must be portioned out and the temple that now lay in ruins rebuilt. There was nothing to wake the faintest suspicion in an impartial observer that Israel could ever be restored. There was not the smallest assignable ground for such an expectation. But Ezekiel believed in it nevertheless, in the strength of his profound conviction of Yahweh's power and his love for Israel.

However imperfect his ideal may have been it does him honour that he had a religious ideal at all.

CHAPTER X.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF YAHWEH.

JEREMIAH XXXI. 29, 30; EZEKIEL XVIII.; ISAIAH LII. 13—LIII.

"WHY must we suffer all this?" was the question constantly asked by the humbled Judeans—the question that had been constantly asked and variously answered ever since the defeat of Josiah. "The fathers ate sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge," people answered sadly and bitterly. The general opinion was that Israel was paying the penalty of Manasseh's sins. Yahweh, the holy one, visited the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation.¹ But this answer did not satisfy everyone, for it seemed to make Yahweh's justice to each individual taken by himself extremely doubtful. Besides, it did not explain why one had so much more to suffer than

¹ Deuteronomy v. 9; Exodus xx. 5, xxxiv. 7; Jeremiah xxxii. 18.

another. Yahweh seemed capricious and inconsistent. Was Israel's god unjust ?

"No ! he is absolutely just," replied Ezekiel, "juster than Israel thinks for. Why prate of children's teeth set on edge because their fathers have eaten sour grapes ? Never use that proverb more ! All lives are mine, says Yahweh, the life of the son and the life of the father ; and he who sins shall die himself. If any man is righteous and offers not sacrifice upon the hills nor lifts his eyes to idols, commits not adultery, oppresses none, returns the pledge he has received, and is guilty of no robbery, but feeds the hungry and clothes the naked, exacts no usury or interest, practices no iniquity but deals uprightly, walks after my ordinances and observes my statutes—such a righteous man shall be surely spared alive.

"And if a good man such as this should have a godless son, who leaves all these good things undone but does the wicked ones, shall he be spared alive ? Of a truth he shall not ! He shall surely perish, and may his blood be upon his own head ! So again if a righteous son have a godless father, he shall not die for his father's sins. His father himself shall die, for it is he that has done the evil. Why talk, then, of a son atoning for his father's sins ? The man who sins shall die himself, and no one suffers for another's wickedness.

"But if a wicked man repents and lives righteously and observes my statutes, then he shall not perish, but all his former trespasses shall be forgotten, and he shall live in his righteousness. Have I any pleasure in the sinner's death ? Nay, but I would have him repent and live ! But again, if a righteous man should fall away and walk in the path of the godless man who has rescued his life by repentance, then all the good deeds that he has done shall be remembered no more, and he shall perish for his wickedness.

"Then let not the house of Israel say that my ways are

capricious and unequal. My ways are steady and consistent, but yours are not ; for many a godless man repents, and many righteous fall away. Of a truth every man is judged by his deeds. Return, then, from your trespasses, that they may not be your ruin, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit ; for why should you die, O house of Israel ! Ah me, I desire not the death of the sinner, says the Lord Yahweh, wherefore repent and live !"¹

Regarded as a solution of the great problem of the connection between the sins of men on the one hand and their prosperity or adversity upon the other, this oracle of Ezekiel's has not the smallest value, for it is in glaring contradiction with the facts, and ignores the undeniable effects of the virtue or vice of the parents upon the happiness or misery of the children ; but nevertheless it rests upon a clear perception of the great moral truth that no man is rendered guilty by any one's sins except his own. Obvious as this principle seems to us, it was by no means recognised by the ancient Israelites. In common with other peoples of antiquity they held that the guilt of a crime attached not only to the perpetrator, but to all his family as well. Hence the iniquitous custom of punishing a whole household for the offence of one member was firmly established amongst men, and was attributed without scruple to God. But the growth of gentler manners expelled this barbarous custom from human legislation, first in practice and afterwards in theory,² though it still retained its place as a supposed principle of divine retribution. Ezekiel, however, felt that God could not hold a man guilty of a crime he had not committed, and since neither he nor any of his contemporaries had the smallest doubt that every disaster was due to the retributive justice of Yahweh, he was driven to the conclusion that everyone who suffered must himself have been guilty of sin.

¹ Compare Ezekiel xxxiii. 10-20.

² See Vol. III., pp. 230, 231.

To reconcile this doctrine with the facts of life, Ezekiel could only urge that when Yahweh seemed to punish a righteous man it was because he had fallen into sin at last; and when he suffered a sinner to escape, it was because he had repented. Here, again, he falls into grave error in supposing that the present can wash out the past, and in ignoring the testimony of that sense of guilt which is quickened rather than extinguished by true repentance; but at the same time he grasps the vital truth that past virtue is no excuse for present vice, and that the way to repentance is always open to the sinner.

This intimate blending of truth and error in Ezekiel's teaching rises from his combining a new perception of moral truth with the old error that prosperity and adversity are the direct awards of the deity to virtue and vice. In the light of his higher ideas of justice he boldly and consistently works out the old retributive theory, and this leads him to deny that the fate of any man is in the least degree affected by that of his parents, his children, or his country! The theory that led to such glaring contradictions could not stand, and Ezekiel indirectly contributed to its fall by the very consistency with which he preached it. Unintentionally he showed that it must fall to pieces in the face of facts when separated from the false ideas of the nature of guilt with which it was so closely connected.

At the opposite pole from Ezekiel stands a prophet whose work must rank, both in form and substance, amongst the noblest portions of the Old Testament. His name is unknown; and since his work appears in the last twenty-seven chapters of the book called after Isaiah,¹ he is commonly spoken of as the Second, or sometimes the Babylonian, Isaiah. It is not certain, however, that all these twenty-

¹ Compare Vol. III., p. 327.

seven chapters are from one hand. There appear to be a few, though not many, older passages inserted amongst this prophet's discourses, and it is probable also that a prophecy of later date has here and there been added. The greater part of the oracles, however, seem to be from a single hand, though they vary greatly in tone. The writer probably began his work by comforting and stimulating his people during the last years of the Captivity, and subsequently tried to confirm their faith after the return.

Now, the discourses of this Second Isaiah frequently mention the "servant of Yahweh;" and the prophet himself intimates very distinctly that he uses this expression to signify Israel.¹ Yet, when he describes the "servant of Yahweh," it is obvious that he has not the whole nation in his eye, but only the best and most devout portion, the kernel, as it were, of the people. At any rate, his words are for the most part inapplicable to the real Israel, with all its faults and sins, and applicable only to the people of God, as it ought to be and must become. But he sometimes uses the name of Israel or Jacob for this kernel and sometimes for the whole people, and it is impossible from the nature of the case to draw a clear line between the genuine Israel, the Israel after the spirit, and the actual people; and the consequence is that his exact meaning is not always equally clear, and he is sometimes betrayed by hope and love into using expressions of the whole nation which are really only applicable to this kernel. Of course there were prophets amongst these devout Israelites, and the writer himself was one of them, whence "the servant of Yahweh" is sometimes sketched in colours which clearly indicate the prophetic representatives of Yahweh.²

Now the fact that this servant of Yahweh was an exile,

¹ Isaiah xli. 8, xliv. 21, xlv. 4, xlviii. 20, xlix. 1-7.

² Isaiah xliv. 26, l. 4-10.

and suffered every kind of oppression, was the grievous and terrible enigma which perplexed every thoughtful and devout Israelite. How could it be solved? Let us listen to the answer conveyed in the well-known description of this suffering servant of God:—

“The servant of Yahweh shall be prosperous, exalted, and extolled very high. As many have been appalled at him because his visage was marred till it lost all human shape, and his form was unlike a mortal’s, so shall he cause many heathens to spring up in rapture, so shall he put kings to silence when they see him, for they shall behold what they had never been told of, and see things of which they had never heard.

“Who has believed our preaching? By whom has Yahweh’s might been acknowledged? He sprang up before Yahweh’s face like a sapling, like a shoot coming out of dry ground: without beauty or majesty to secure him reverence, with no splendour to entrance men’s hearts. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of pain and acquainted with sickness; as one from whom we turn our faces away, rejected and contemned.

“Surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our pain, while we thought him stricken, afflicted, and smitten by God. But he was wounded for our sins, bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement that brought us peace was laid on him, and by his stripes we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each one following his own way; but Yahweh has brought upon him the iniquity of us all.

“He was tortured, while he humbled himself and opened not his mouth. He was led to the slaughter like a lamb, like a sheep that is dumb before her shearers. By oppressive judgments he is snatched away, and who that sees it considers that he is stricken to death for the sins of my people? They bury him amongst the godless, and make his

tomb with the violent, though he did no evil and deceit was not found in his mouth.

"Yet it pleased Yahweh to heal his sickness.¹ Though he should give up his life as a trespass-offering, he shall still live on in his posterity, and through him shall Yahweh's good pleasure be accomplished.² By the sufferings of his soul shall he pasture and satisfy many, by his knowledge of God shall my servant make many righteous, and bear their sins.³ Therefore I give him booty amongst the great ones, and he shall take his share with the mighty, because he gave up his life and suffered himself to be numbered with the transgressors, bearing the trespasses of many and mediating for the sinners."

After the lapse of many centuries this discourse became the subject of deep reflection, and has caused no little controversy. It is easy to see why. The Christians, who constantly found descriptions of their Master in the books of the Old Testament, which they even regarded as a regular source of information concerning his experiences,⁴ saw him and no one else in this "suffering servant of the Lord."⁵ This need not surprise us. If we read the prophecy superficially and neglect passages which are wholly inapplicable to Jesus, such as the one which promises a share with the mighty in the spoil, then it really may produce the impression of a description of him and of his patient sufferings for God's sake. And again, when the Christian Church began in the course of time to delight more and more in speculating upon the meaning of the Master's death, and the doctrine of the vicarious suffering of Christ became current, this prophecy could not fail to become one of the most cherished supports of the whole doctrinal scheme. What could be clearer than that it was enunciated here?

Now, when tradition has once impressed an interpretation such as this upon our minds, it is very difficult to take an

¹ * * Very doubtful reading.

⁴ Compare Vol. V., pp. 46—49.

⁵ See Matthew viii. 17; Mark ix. 12, xv. 28; Luke xxii. 37; Acts viii. 32 ff.; 1 Corinthians xv. 3; 1 Peter ii. 22, 24.

unprejudiced view of the prophecy; and the consequence is that people have found all kinds of meanings in it which are not really there.

In the first place the prophet gives such a graphic sketch of the servant of Yahweh that he sometimes appears to be describing an actual man, and certain scholars have inferred, perhaps correctly, that he borrowed a part of his discourse from an older work, which described some pious sufferer for God's sake, such as Jeremiah. But in any case the prophet himself certainly intended to describe an aggregate and not a single person.

To understand the prophet's words we must remember that he is speaking poetically, and therefore not without exaggeration. He paints the woeful state of the "servant of Yahweh" in such dark colours that we should suppose all the pious Israelites to have been hopelessly poor, sick, oppressed, and wretched, which of course was far from being the case. Indeed, it was not so much that they groaned under the personal sufferings of slavery or were in any actual need, as that they grieved over the condition of their fatherland and the exile of so many of their people. In the same way it is an exaggeration to call "Yahweh's servant" *righteous* without any qualification, and to say that he has done nothing wrong and that no deceit is found in his mouth. At any rate we must not take these passages literally, but must remember that the prophet himself elsewhere calls the servant of Yahweh deaf and blind.¹ It is true that what he means by this blindness and deafness is not any gross sinfulness, but simply that despondency which from time to time came over the devout Israelites and made them complain that Yahweh had forgotten them, and that they had been zealous for him in vain;² nevertheless the expression shows that he was far from ascribing perfect righteous-

¹ Isaiah xlii 19.

² Isaiah xl. 27, xlix. 4, 14.

ness to the servant of Yahweh. Accordingly he makes Yahweh say distinctly¹ to "Israel which shall not be forgotten," "I wash out your trespasses like a mist, and your sins like a cloud. Turn again to me, for I have redeemed you!" The purity of Yahweh's servant, then, is only relative. In comparison with the many Israelites who practised idolatry or were indifferent to the people's future, the spiritual nucleus of the nation might be called righteous; but the fact that many defects still clung to them could not possibly escape so earnest a man as the Second Isaiah.

If we bear the poetical character of the prophet's discourse steadily in mind, we shall not be tempted to look for more than there really is in his expressions as to the connection between the sufferings of the pious and the sins of the people. The servant of Yahweh does indeed make many righteous by his piety, and makes atonement as a mediator for the trespasses of others, just as a priest teaches the laity, and cleanses them from their sins by his sacrifices and consecrations; but he does not suffer in their stead. His suffering is destined in the first place to establish his own glory. When we are also told that the people are healed by his stripes, we must remember that, according to the Israelites, all sufferings had an atoning power of blotting out offences. When evil had been done, then Yahweh's wrath was heavy on the sinner on his house and on his country, till the trespass had been expiated by the evildoer himself, or by his children or his people, unless means had been found of appeasing Yahweh with sacrifices. There was no forgiveness without shedding of blood. There was no deliverance from suffering, which never came upon a man or a people except as the punishment of some sin, until the penalty appointed by Yahweh had been paid. Thus, when the prophet foresaw Israel's return from the Captivity, he declared that it had

¹ Isaiah xlv. 21, 22; compare Jeremiah xlv. 27, 28.

already received in double measure the punishment of all its sins;¹ and Jeremiah in like manner took for granted that the prospects of the captives were brighter than those of the remnant in Jerusalem, because the exiles had suffered the penalty, and would now return and be converted, whereas Zedekiah and his companions had still to undergo their fate.² So when the prophet says that the punishment which brings peace to the people falls upon Yahweh's servant, and that Yahweh has laid upon him the sins of them all, he means that the pious Israelites suffered with their people, and this suffering was the penalty for Israel's transgressions. Indeed the devout exiles suffered more than the rest, for they gave greater offence to the heathens, and were at the same time dissatisfied with their countrymen, from whom accordingly they had sometimes much to bear. Moreover they felt the melancholy state of things more keenly than others did. Thus, by suffering for the trespasses of others, they helped to appease Yahweh and restore the Israelitish state. For their sakes Yahweh would rescue Israel, just as he would have spared Sodom and Gomorrah if there had been but five righteous men in them;³ just as he had forgiven Israel in the wilderness at the intercession of Moses,⁴ and would have been ready to forgive it again after Josiah's time, at the prayer of a Moses or a Samuel, had not its sins been of too black a die.⁵

In sharp distinction from Ezekiel and others, our prophet was profoundly conscious of the bond that united all the sons of Israel to each other. The whole people suffered, and each member must therefore suffer—the devoutest most. And when these last were restored to honour, the blessings they had earned would be shared by all. The piety of Yahweh's servant not only secured a glorious future for Israel, but also made it righteous, and fitted it to become a light for

¹ Isaiah xl. 2.² See p. 45.³ Genesis xviii. 23 ff.⁴ Exodus xxxii. 9–14, 30–34; Psalm cvi. 23.⁵ Jeremiah xv. 1.

the heathen. This was a thought rich in salutary consequences. The sufferings of Yahweh's servant for God's sake had a moral goal. This idea is often expressed by the Second Isaiah, but nowhere, perhaps, more beautifully than in the following passage:¹ "Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom I delight. I put my spirit upon him that he may teach the heathens the way they should go; not by crying or shouting or lifting up his voice in the street, for a bruised reed he shall not break and a smoking wick he shall not quench, but shall faithfully teach their duty to men. He shall not be discouraged or wearied till he has established right upon the earth and distant peoples long for his judgment.—Thus says god Yahweh, who created the heavens and stretched them forth, who spread out the earth and all that it bears, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to them that dwell on it: 'I, Yahweh, have called you to salvation and taken you by the hand, have made you a link between the people and Yahweh, a light for the heathen, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the captives from prison and those that sit in darkness from bondage.'"

Strictly speaking these descriptions of the "suffering servant of Yahweh" cannot be said to embody the true and beautiful conception that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." This is only true because the patient faith of the martyrs shows how deeply rooted their conviction is in their own and generally in many kindred hearts, and produces a deep impression upon both friends and foes; but this conception cannot be traced in the mind of our prophet, who shares with antiquity generally the belief that temporal disaster is the punishment for sin, and therefore reveals the wrath of God. Nevertheless he has struck upon the deep and touching truth that the sufferings of the faithful may be the means of securing to mankind the truest spiritual blessings.

¹ Isaiah xlii. 1-7, compare xlix. 1-7.

CHAPTER XL.
REVIVING HOPES.

ISAIAH XIV. 4—21, XXXV., XL.

AFTER a brilliant reign of forty-three years king Nebuchadrezzar died (561 B.C.), and left his son a mighty kingdom that stretched from the Tigris to the Mediterranean Sea, and divided the whole of Asia Minor with two others still greater than itself, that of the Medes in the north, and that of the Lydians west of the Halys. The pride of the kingdom was its magnificent capital. There stood the temple of Bel,¹ restored and beautified though not actually built by Nebuchadrezzar himself. Stupendous walls, upon which two four-horse chariots could meet and pass with ease, encircled the city. The river walls, not yet completed, girt the two banks of the Euphrates as it flowed through the city, and were terminated by the brazen river gates. There, too, the great artificial lake might be seen, which served the same purpose as that of king Moeris in Egypt;² and there stood the royal palace, the so-called hanging gardens of which were reckoned by the Greeks amongst the seven wonders of the world. All this magnificence bore witness to the fact that in Nebuchadrezzar the world had lost one of those princes whose enterprise and energy hold peoples in subjection and call colossal works into existence—a demigod upon the earth, who might have stood upon the ramparts of his palace, as a later Jewish writer represents him doing,³ and exclaimed with ample reason: “This is the mighty Babylon that I have built for my royal residence, by the power of my strong arm and as a monument to my glory!”

But the history of the kingdom after his death shows how soon all this power might be broken and all this splendour

¹ Compare Vol. I., p. 115.

² Compare Vol. I., p. 303.

³ Daniel iv. 30.

dimmed ; for Nebuchadrezzar had been dead but three and twenty years when the whole of Babylonia was swallowed up in the kingdom of the Persians. His three immediate successors, the first of whom, Evil-merodach, we know already as the patron of the captive monarch Jehoiakin,¹ were men of little mark. The next and last, Nabonedus, did his very utmost to defend his throne,—but who could stand against Cyrus ?

This Cyrus, or Koresh as the Jews called him, was a Persian chief, and, as such, a subject of the Medes. In the year 558 B.C. he saw his chance of unfurling the banner of revolt against king Astyages, and was so successful as not only to gain the freedom of his own country, but eventually, after a desperate struggle, to subdue the kingdom of the Medes itself. Now that he was king of the Persians and Medes, he turned his weapons against Cræsus, the wealthy king of the Lydians, and conquered his land also. Then came the turn of Babylon. Nabonedus had foreseen this and had made enormous preparations for war, though his chief reliance was probably on the strength of his capital, which Cyrus soon besieged, having previously inflicted a severe defeat upon the Babylonians in its neighbourhood. The king threw himself into Borsippa, and entrusted the defence of Babylon to his son. The city seemed to be impregnable, and all the usual arts of war were tried upon it in vain. The walls were too thick to be battered down by the rams, too lofty and top well commanded by turrets to be scaled, and the place was so well provisioned that the besiegers were more likely to suffer want than the besieged. But Cyrus had recourse to a stratagem. He deepened and extended the artificial lake which Nebuchadrezzar had made to regulate the height of the water in the Euphrates, till it was capable of receiving the whole volume of the stream ; at the same time he widened the canal that

¹ See p. 85.

carried the water into it, and then dammed up the river just below. The numbers of his army enabled him to complete this gigantic operation with great rapidity, and it proved entirely successful. As soon as the troops who had remained in front of the city perceived that the water had sunk low enough for their purpose, they rushed in by the river bed and scaled the not very lofty walls that ran through the city by the river side. The inhabitants were celebrating a great feast at the time, and the city was so enormous and was taken so completely by surprise that the majority of its inhabitants knew nothing of the matter till the following day. Upon this Nabonedus gave himself up as a prisoner. The kingdom of the Chaldees had fallen, and Cyrus reigned over them also. (588 B.C.)

We may well believe that the Jewish exiles looked upon these events with intensest interest, and that their hopes of a return to the fatherland were successively quickened by the appearance of Cyrus, by his growing power, by the defeat of Nabonedus, and at last by the fall of Babylon. Though only eight and twenty years had elapsed between the taking of Jerusalem and the revolt of the Persians against the Medes, yet a quarter of a century is ample time to quell the spirit of a people in hopeless slavery and to quench the fire of prophecy. Both the captives and the remnant in Palestine were doubtless more wont to complain that Yahweh had forgotten them than to express their trust that he would deliver them. But the rise of Cyrus gave them a ray of hope at once, and as he gradually showed his invincible power, as Media bowed to him first and Lydia next, as Babylon's army was defeated and the capital itself besieged, these hopes grew ever stronger, till at last the prophetic fire burst out anew under their influence. Though we have no direct accounts of what was going on amongst the Israelites, yet the prophetic discourses uttered

or written at the time bear witness to their thoughts, their beliefs, their hopes, and their fears.

Thus one of the exiles composed an elaborate oracle on the humiliation which the Chaldean gods and Babylon itself would endure, because Nebuchadrezzar had shattered Israel. At the same time he exhorted the Jews to flee from the land of exile, that they might not share its terror and distress. The writer put this prediction into the mouth of Jeremiah, and declared that this man of God wrote it down in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign, and gave it to Seraiah, the head of a Jewish embassy to Nebuchadrezzar, telling him to read it in Babylon to the Jews, and then tie the roll to a stone and throw it into the Euphrates, as an emblematic declaration that Babylon itself should in like manner sink for ever.¹

Others spoke or wrote in their own names, or anonymously. Amongst them was a prophet who pointed to the Medes as the instruments of Yahweh's judgment upon Babylon, in his terrible day of vengeance.² His work has excited attention principally on account of the following song of triumph over the king of Babylon, which he puts upon the lips of the Israelites in preparation for the time of their deliverance: "How still has the tyrant grown, and his raging sunk into quiet! Yahweh has broken the staff of the wicked one, broken the rod of the oppressor, which smote the peoples in fury, smote them with a continual stroke, trod down the nations with pitiless tread. All the world is at rest and peace, and breaks into cries of joy. The cypresses rejoice in thy fall, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, 'Since thou art laid low no one comes here to fell us!'—The shadow-land is stirred below, and comes forth to meet thee. It rouses its shades for thee; all the rulers of the earth rise up from their thrones, all the princes of the heathens. With one mouth they cry to thee, 'Thou, too, art an empty shadow

¹ Jeremiah I, li.

² Isaiah xiii.—xiv. 23.

as we; thou art now become like unto us!'—Thy pomp has gone down to the shadow-land with the melody of thy lutes; thy bed beneath is corruption, thy covering above is worms. How art thou fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawning! How art thou stretched on the ground, thou trampler upon nations! Thou didst say in thy heart: 'I will rise up to heaven, exalt my throne above the stars of God, seat me on the mountain of gods in the north, ascend above the masses of cloud, and be like unto the Most High!' Nay, thou art brought down to the underworld. They that see shall gaze and look narrowly at thee. 'Is this the man that made the earth tremble and shook the kingdoms? that made the earth a wilderness, that destroyed its cities, and suffered not his captives to return?'—All the kings of the heathens rest in honour, each in his dwelling; but thou art cast out of thy grave as a worthless log of wood. Girt with the slain whom the sword has pierced, thou art thrust down into the earth,¹ a carcase trodden under foot! Thou art not buried amongst the kings, for thou hast destroyed thy land and slain thy people. The seed of the wicked is no more mentioned for ever. Make ready a place of slaughter for his sons, because of the wickedness of their fathers, that they may never rise and take possession of the land and fill its face once more with cities."

A third writer in the exile bids his "thrashed and down-trodden people" take comfort from the approach of Elam or Persia and Media, who will bring Babylon to its fall and will grind her idols to pieces;² while a fourth describes the return of the exiles in the strains that follow:³

The wilderness and barren land shall be glad,

The desert shall rejoice and be green like the after-grass,

All shall be blossoms and shouting and dancing for joy;

¹ Translation uncertain.

² Isaiah xxi. 1—10.

³ Isaiah xxxv.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given her,
The beauty of Carmel and Sharon ;
They see the majesty of Yahweh, the glory of our
God.

Strengthen the weak hands,
Confirm the feeble knees.
Say to the fearful : " Be strong, fear not !
Behold your god ! Vengeance is coming, the ven-
geance of God !

He comes to deliver you."
Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened,
The ears of the deaf unstopped ;
Then shall the lame man leap as a hart,
And the tongue of the dumb shall shout for joy.
In the desert shall water-courses be scooped,
And streams in the thirsty land.
The mirage shall turn to a pool,
And the thirsty land to a stream of water.
In the place where jackals couched and dwelt
The grass shall grow up into reeds and rushes.
And a path shall be there and a way ;
Men shall call it a " holy way."
The unclean shall not tread it ; it belongs to the holy ;
The simplest wayfarer need not stray.¹

No lion shall be there,
No beast of prey shall walk it.
No hurtful thing shall be found there,²
But the redeemed shall tread this path.
Yahweh's ransomed shall return
And enter Sion with shouts of joy.
Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads ;
Joy and gladness they shall obtain,
And sorrow and sadness shall flee away.

¹ ² Doubtful translation.

The same tone of high-wrought expectation meets us throughout the Second Isaiah's oracles. We may take the first chapter as a specimen :¹

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, says your God. Speak gently to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her service is finished, her iniquity pardoned, for she has received at Yahweh's hand a twofold punishment for all her sins. Hark ! there is a cry : 'Make ready a way for Yahweh in the desert, level a path for our God in the wilderness ! All the valleys shall be filled up and the mountains and hills cut down ; the uneven land shall be levelled and the rough places shall be made plane ; Yahweh's glory shall be revealed, and all mankind shall see his blessings,'² for it is he who has ordered this !'

"A voice cries 'Announce !' and I answered, 'What shall I announce ?'—All flesh is as grass, and all its glory like a flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our god shall stand for ever.

"Go up into a lofty mountain, thou messenger of Sion's joy ! Lift up a mighty voice, thou bearer of glad news to Jerusalem ! Cry without fear to Judah's cities : 'Behold your god !' See the lord Yahweh comes in his might, with dominion upon his arm. See, he brings with him salvation and his reward goes out before him. He pastures his flock like a shepherd, who gathers the lambs in his arms, carries them in his bosom, and gently leads the mothers.

"Who can measure the waters in the hollow of his hand, and mete out the heavens with a span ? Who can comprehend the dust of the earth in a measure, weigh the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance ? Who has understood the spirit of Yahweh and made himself his counsellor ? With whom has he taken counsel and by whom has he been instructed ? Who taught him the way of judgment and

¹ Isaiah xl.

² After an amended version.

knowledge? Who showed him how to be perfect in insight? See! he counts the heathens as a drop of water upon the bucket or a grain of dust on the balance. The islands, to him, are like flying dust. All Lebanon has not wood enough nor beasts for a sacrifice worthy of him.

“Then if all the heathens are as nothing before him, are vanity and things of nought, to whom will ye liken God? and how will ye make an image of him? The workman makes an image, the goldsmith covers it with gold and fixes silver chains to it; or, if he is too poor for this, he chooses a good sound piece of wood and makes him an image that will not rot! But have ye not heard and perceived? Has it not been told you from of old? Or did you not comprehend it? He sits over the circuit of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers to him. He stretches out the heaven like a tent to dwell in. He destroys princes and brings judges of the earth to nought. They are scarce planted or sown, their root has scarce struck in the ground, ere he blows upon them and they wither, and are driven in the storm like chaff! Then how will ye make an image of me that shall be like me, indeed? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see who has made these stars, who brings out their hosts by number, calling them by their names till, by his dread might, not one is missing!

“Why sayest thou then, O Jacob, and declarest, O Israel, ‘My way is forgotten by Yahweh and my right is passed over by my God?’—Dost thou not know, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, Yahweh, the creator of all the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary, and that his understanding is unsearchable? He gives power to the weary and strength to the weak. Young men may faint and be weary, and the strong may ever stumble, but they who trust in Yahweh renew their strength, spread out their wings like the eagles, run but are never weary, walk but are never faint.”

Many other examples of the Second Isaiah's preaching might be added, but we must put some limits to our citations from him. In describing the return of the exiles, however, we shall give a few passages which he probably wrote to celebrate that event rather than at an earlier period. But of course it is difficult to fix the exact date of the various oracles, especially as we do not know how far they were simply written and how far they were actually spoken.

We must now make a few remarks as to the attitude taken up by the prophet. First of all we must observe that he is emphatically monotheistic. He does not dream of recognising the existence of any other god than Yahweh: "Ye are my witnesses, says Yahweh, and my servant whom I have chosen,¹ that ye may perceive it and believe in me, understanding that I am he. Before me was no god created, nor shall be after me. I, I am Yahweh, and beside me there is none that saves. I have announced and delivered and foretold, when there was no strange [god] amongst you. Ye are my witnesses, says Yahweh, and I am God. Yea! from of old I am he, and none can deliver from my hand. I accomplish it and who shall hinder?"² Thus says Yahweh, Israel's king and redeemer, Yahweh of hosts: "I am the first and I the last. There is no god beside me."³

Even in earlier times many Israelites had treated the worship of other gods than Yahweh as identical with the worship of images,⁴ and since our prophet, like all the ancients, was incapable of appreciating the religious rites and conceptions of those from whom he differed, it was inevitable that his emphatic preaching of monotheism should be coupled with the most violent attacks upon the images which he saw in "the land of idols."⁵ He assails them with biting sarcasm. We have already heard him scoffing at the heathens

¹ Compare p. 109. ² Isaiah xliii. 10—13. ³ Isaiah xliv. 6, and elsewhere.

⁴ See Vol. III., p. 419.

⁵ Jeremiah l. 38.

who, if rich, made idols of metal and, if poor, of wood; and elsewhere¹ he describes in greater detail how all kinds of workmen are employed in preparing these images; how a man fells a tree and makes a god out of one half of the trunk and burns the other half for firewood to warm himself or to roast his meat! Of what avail was such a god, that could neither hear nor see? Those who put their trust in these images would all be covered with shame! Bel collapsed and Nebo was laid low. Men might carry them where they chose, for they could not move themselves or give any answer to those that worshipped them. But Israel would be glorified, for his god was Yahweh, who had predicted from of old what was now fulfilled, who had called an eagle [Cyrus] from the east, and whose pleasure was accomplished in all things. He would give salvation to Sion.²

That Yahweh had known beforehand and had foretold by his servants all that would happen to his people was a point of extreme importance in the mind of the Second Isaiah, and he returns to it with corresponding frequency. If we ask how far he was justified in doing so, there can be but one reply. The earlier men of God had enjoyed no supernatural insight into the future, and were no more enlightened beforehand about Cyrus and his Persians than about the duration of the exile or the wretched subsequent condition of the people. But many of them had so emphatically announced the judgments which Yahweh would bring upon Israel, declaring at the same time that the people could never perish and would inherit a glorious future, that when the exiles who believed in Yahweh's might regained their courage, they would naturally find in their present experiences the fulfilment of the words of the ancient prophets. The effect was heightened by a few spurious prophecies, such as that which Isaiah was said to have uttered to Hezekiah when the latter

¹ Isaiah xliv. 10—20.

² Isaiah xliv.

had displayed his treasures to the king of Babylon,¹ and Jeremiah's supposed prediction of the fall of Babylon said to have been thrown into the Euphrates tied to a stone.²

The Second Isaiah put the following challenge to the idols into Yahweh's mouth:³ "Come, let us vie with each other! Bring out your proofs, and tell us what shall come to pass! Tell us the contents of former predictions, and prophesy what is still to come, that we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad! See! you are less than nothing, and your deeds are nothing. He that chooses you is an abomination.—It was I who called him [Cyrus] from the North, and he came, called him who invokes my name from the East, that he might tread upon governors like mud, like a potter pounding his clay. Who has foretold all this from the first, that we may know it? from ancient times, that we may say, 'It was true!' None has done it but I! I was the first to say unto Sion, 'See! they are there!' and to give the glad tidings to Jerusalem."

It is very strange that in the foregoing passage the prophet should make Yahweh describe Cyrus as "him who invokes my name," since the Persian monarch was no servant of Yahweh, but worshipped another god; and elsewhere the prophet himself makes Yahweh say to Cyrus: "I called thee by thy name and spoke to thee, though thou didst not know me."⁴ Indeed it is so strange as to make us half suspect that we have not the words really uttered by the prophet. 'Or is it possible that he had already heard of the Persians having no idols, and that this fact secured them his sympathy? Or did he on this one occasion call Cyrus a servant of Yahweh by a slip, because he respected him as the instrument of Yahweh's will? At any rate he habitually regards him as Yahweh's instrument and minister.

¹ Isaiah xxxix.

² Jeremiah l, li.

³ Isaiah xli. 21—27.

⁴ Isaiah xlv. 4.

Cyrus is to him "Yahweh's shepherd, who accomplishes his counsel and says to Jerusalem, 'Be thou built!' and to the temple, 'Be thou established;'"¹ or Yahweh's anointed, whom he takes by the hand and crowns with victory in order that he may acknowledge the name of Yahweh.²

Koresh, the instrument of Yahweh, the minister of Israel's god! What enormous consequences this involves!—Nothing less than the belief that the fates of all Asia were guided with a view to Israel's requirements. Why did Yahweh summon the Persian monarch? Why did he make the peoples one after another fall before his arms? Simply and solely for the sake of Israel.³ In order that the chosen people of the Lord might recover their freedom the Chaldean kingdom must be brought low and must perish for ever, for its monarchs had sinned in devastating the land and the temple of Yahweh, and oppressing his people.

And why would Yahweh rescue Israel and restore it to its ancient splendour? Because of the people's goodness? Far indeed from that! Israel relied upon the glory of his god, it is true, but forgot the precepts of truth and righteousness; and that was the very reason why Yahweh had revealed all that was now taking place by his messengers beforehand; for he knew that the people was obstinate and of a brazen countenance, and that if he had not expressly foretold it all, they might perhaps have ascribed their deliverance to the power of their idols! They were a faithless race, "trespassers from their very birth," and their god only delivered them for his name's sake, that he might win the glory of the deed. "Alas!" cried Yahweh to them, "would that ye had hearkened to my messengers! Then should your peace have been like a river, your salvation like the waves of the sea, your posterity countless and imperishable."⁴ Yahweh loved

¹ Isaiah xlv. 28.

² Isaiah xlv. 1—3.

³ Isaiah xlv. 4.

⁴ Isaiah xlviii. 1—19. Compare xliii. 22—24.

Israel. "Sion said, 'Yahweh has forsaken me and the Lord has forgotten me!' Does a woman forget her sucking child, and take no pity on the babe at her breast? Though she should forget, I forget not you! I have graven you on the palms of my hands; and your walls are ever before my mind."¹

The very boldness of the conception: "Yahweh, the universal ruler, guides all things for the good of Israel, his beloved though rebellious people," precludes the supposition that it found a place in the hearts of all the Israelites. It would be too much to expect. The Second Isaiah may have commanded a certain amount of sympathy, but the mass of the Jews, who could never take so lofty a flight as his, revealed their love of Yahweh chiefly by their hatred of the Chaldeans. But yet such inspired words, such sublime conceptions, cannot have failed to exercise an enlivening power that quickened still further the rising hopes of the people.

So when Cyrus defeated the Babylonians, the Judæans were in a state of strained expectation; and when Babylon fell, many of them cherished the deep conviction: "The time of deliverance is at hand. Cyrus is our destined deliverer!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN UNDER ZERUBBABEL.

EZRA I.—III. 6; ISAIAH LIV., LV., LXI.

"**Y**AHWEH, the god of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and commanded me to build him a house at Jerusalem, in Judæa. As for them who belong to his people, may their god be with them! Let them return to Jerusalem, and build up the temple of Israel's god, who dwells there! And let the people of the places where

¹ Isaiah xlix. 14—16.

they now sojourn give them all kinds of goods, and assist them also with free contributions for the rebuilding of Yahweh's temple."—Such was the purport, according to the book of Ezra, of an edict which Cyrus, king of the Persians, issued in the first year of his reign over Chaldæa. The very first words of the edict, however, show that it is not authentic, for Ahuramazda, and not Yahweh, was the name which Cyrus gave to his Most High. The edict was probably composed by the writer of the book of Ezra himself. He lived in the third century B.C., and compiled the two books of Chronicles, as well as the work which is now split into two and called the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. This latter work contains memoirs written by Ezra and Nehemiah themselves, together with other matter of a much less trustworthy character.

The main provision of this spurious edict, however, was really made. Cyrus gave the Jews permission to return to their fatherland. His motives in doing so are obvious. In Babylonia the Jews were discontented subjects, who cherished an implacable hatred against the ruler who held them captive; whereas, if they returned by his permission to their own land, gratitude would attach them to himself and his house, and they would be the faithful guardians of his kingdom on the Egyptian frontier. It is quite possible also that, with a Persian's hatred of image worship, he felt kindly disposed towards the Jews, who were so entirely at one with him in this respect, as against the Chaldæans. But doubtless political considerations weighed most heavily with the conqueror. It was distinctly to his interest to secure the loyalty of this section of his subjects by gratifying their love of their country.

Nor was he content with simply granting them permission to return and rebuild the temple. He gave back to their leader all the consecrated utensils that Nebuchadrezzar had brought from Jerusalem and deposited in the temples and royal treasure houses; in all there were five thousand four hun-

dred gold and silver bowls, cups, and platters. All this leads us to suspect that Cyrus may have been under some obligations to the Jews; nor does anything seem more probable than that some of them, roused by the words of the prophets who recognised in Cyrus the chosen instrument of Yahweh's will, should take the earliest opportunity of joining his side and fighting against the Chaldeans under his banner.

It was not a question of the return of a few hundred souls to find an abode as best they could; but of many thousands, who must be fairly established in possession of their ancient land; and accordingly Cyrus, no doubt in compliance with the wishes of the Jews themselves, placed at their head a recognised governor of the province they were to repopulate. The title "Sheshbazzar" or "the Tirshatha" is given him in the Authorised Version. This man was a descendant of king Jehoiakin,¹ and bore the significant name of "Zerubbabel," that is, *born in Babylon*.

The great question now was whether the exiles as a body would avail themselves of the opportunity given them, and quit the land of the stranger. We may well imagine how confidently the prophets who had foretold the fall of Babylon now urged their hesitating fellow-believers, and sought to breathe their own courage into the hearts of the timorous. It is possible that we still possess some passages from the oracles delivered at this time, but it is impossible confidently to assign the date and occasion of each of the prophecies of this period.

Even before the permission to return had been granted a prophet might exclaim:² "Up! ye that are athirst, come to the waters! Come, buy and eat, ye that have no money! Buy without money, buy wine and milk without price! Why weigh out your silver for what is not bread, and toil for what satisfies not? If ye hearken to me ye shall eat precious food, and your soul shall be refreshed with richness. Incline

¹ 1 Chronicles iii. 16 ff.

² Isaiah lv.

your ear and come unto me ; hearken, that ye may live. I strike an eternal covenant with you, and give the unerring signs of favour which I have promised to David. Behold, I have made my servant Israel a witness amongst the peoples, a prince and ruler over the nations. Ye shall summon a people ye know not ; a nation that knows not you shall run to you because of Yahweh your god, because of Israel's Holy One, for he shall glorify you.

"Seek ye Yahweh while he may be found; call upon him while he is near! Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let them return unto Yahweh that he may have pity; to our god, for he will abundantly pardon.

"For my counsel is not your counsel, nor are your ways mine, says Yahweh. But as the heaven is higher than the earth, so is my counsel mightier than yours. As surely as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and return not thither, but water the earth and make it fruitful and full of increase, that the husbandman may have seed to sow and bread to eat, so surely my commands and promises shall not be vain, but shall accomplish my pleasure and fulfil my purpose.

"In joy shall you go forth, in peace shall you be led. Mountains and hills shall burst forth before you into cries of joy; all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush the cypress shall grow, instead of the heather the myrtle. It shall be for a token of Yahweh's glory, imperishable for ever."

If Israel had already been reminded in such words as these of the unshaken fidelity of his god, the glorious promises might be repeated with double emphasis now that some of them were already beginning to be fulfilled.

The Second Isaiah could now cry more boldly than ever.¹

¹ Isaiah lxi.

"The spirit of Yahweh is upon me, for he has anointed me a prophet to bring glad tidings to the afflicted, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and opening of the prison to them that are in fetters; to proclaim the year of Yahweh's pleasure, the day of the vengeance of our god; to comfort all who mourn. To Sion's mourners I bring a coronet instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, a festal robe instead of depression. They shall be called the oak trees of justice, planted by Yahweh, and they shall be glorified.

"See! they shall build up the old ruins, and shall rear the places that have long lain waste, and shall rebuild the cities that were destroyed and have lain for generations desolate. Then shall strangers support you and pasture your flocks, aliens shall be your ploughmen and vine dressers, and you shall be named the priests of Yahweh and called the servants of our god. The wealth of the nations you shall consume, and their glory you shall possess.—Aye! instead of shame they shall have a double share, in place of being scorned they shall shout for joy. In their land they shall have a double portion, shall inherit eternal joy.

"For I, Yahweh, love justice and hate falsehood and wrong; I faithfully give them their reward, and make an everlasting covenant with them. Thus shall their seed be known among the peoples, their posterity among the nations. All they who see them shall know them for a race whom Yahweh has blessed.

"I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh; my soul shall be glad in my god, for he clothes me in festal garments, he wraps me in the mantle of prosperity, as a bridegroom crowned with a garland, as a bride adorned with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth her produce and a garden makes its plants spring up, so the lord Yahweh makes salvation break forth and glory in the sight of the heathens."

Many of the Israelites were carried along by this prophetic enthusiasm, and made ready to return with their households to Jerusalem; but the majority were not prepared to make the venture yet. No wonder! It needed no little courage; for many of the exiles had gained possessions, and had taken Jeremiah's advice¹ in building houses and cultivating lands, in contracting marriages and bringing up children, in furthering the welfare of the land of their sojourn, finding their joy in its prosperity, and, in a word, ordering their lives in the foreign land as if it were their home. And now their new fatherland was dear to them, and they shrank from the terrible difficulties of the journey and the settlement in a defenceless land. Considerations of a religious nature might also come into play. It was certain, indeed, that Israel would one day be restored to honour; but had Yahweh's appointed time already come? Was the Messianic kingdom really to be established now? Who could tell? Prophets said so, it was true; but Judah had learned by the bitter experience of the last half century of her existence how liable the prophets were to error, and it is not surprising that the exiles were slow to place implicit confidence in them now. Jeremiah had, indeed, foretold the fall of the city and the temple; but all his numerous opponents had done exactly the reverse. Then there were many zealous worshippers of Yahweh who believed that Israel must be completely reformed according to the priestly law before they could rely with certainty upon Yahweh's support. Many of the Jews accordingly, while wishing all possible success to their more adventurous brothers, while trying to hope for the best and readily assisting with contributions, were nevertheless unwilling to join the expedition themselves.

The movement was therefore headed for the most part by

¹ Jeremiah xxix. 4—7. Compare p. 46.

fiery spirits of the prophetic school. It was religious enthusiasm rather than calm deliberation that presided over their counsels. It was but natural that the priestly order should be strongly represented, for the ministers of the temple at Jerusalem had for some time guided the religious development of Judah. Josiah's reformation was very largely their work, and many of the prophets were little more than their mouthpieces.¹ Accordingly we find that they made up at least an eighth of the returning exiles. The priests proper were now distinguished for the first time from the Levites, that is to say, the descendants of the old Levitical priests of the *bamahs*,² and also from the singers, the porters, the slaves of the sanctuary (*nethinim* or "given," as they were called), and the descendants of the Canaanites, whom Solomon had assigned to the temple as serfs.³ Against four thousand priests, however, but seventy-four Levites were found amongst the returning bands, or including singers and porters three hundred and fourteen. This was very natural, for the prospects of the Levites were far less brilliant than those of the priests, and consequently Judæa had not such powerful attractions for them.

Even amongst the devouter exiles worldly considerations were by no means without influence in determining whether they should stay or go, and of course the kernel of real believers was joined by a great number of others whose motives were not in any degree of a religious nature; some of them had never prospered in Babylon and hoped that a change would be an improvement, others went because their relatives were going, and others, again, were urged by mere love of adventure.

The total number that returned cannot be accurately fixed. It is true that we still have a list headed by the

¹ Compare Jeremiah v. 31.

² See Vol. III., p. 117.

³ See Vol. III., p. 433.

words, "Catalogue of the men who returned to their fatherland, of those whom Nebuchadrezzar carried away," and this list is given three times over, though with many deviations.¹ But as to its trustworthiness we can only say that it was already in existence a little less than a century after the return. In all probability it includes the names not only of the families which returned under Zerubbabel, but also of those which had been left behind in Judæa, and were found there by the exiles on their return, and even of those which subsequently returned from Babylonia, Egypt and elsewhere, when Zerubbabel's companions had made the land rather more habitable. The list in question gives a total of forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty heads of families, or about two hundred thousand souls, but for the reasons given above we must reduce this number by at least one half, and probably by much more.

The returning exiles were for the most part Judæans. Indeed we have no proof that any of them were descendants of the former inhabitants of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. It is probable, of course, that there were certain families of North Israelitish extraction both amongst them and the remnant left in Judæa, for there must have been occasional migrations from Northern into Southern Israel after the fall of Samaria. But be this as it may the Judæans, amongst whom the Benjamites and Simeonites had been completely sunk, formed such a large majority of the returning exiles that although they were regarded as the representatives of Israel's tribes, to the sacred number of twelve, yet they were henceforth spoken of as *Jews*, or men of Judah.

Let us now accompany these Jews on their return. Our Bible contains no accounts of the journey itself, but in the

¹ In Ezra ii., in Nehemiah vii. 6 ff., and in the Apocryphal book commonly called the Third of Esdras.

Apocryphal book called the Third of Esdras, to which we have already referred in a note, sundry details are given, which were very probably borrowed from our book of Ezra in its original form, though they have now fallen out of it.

The first day of the month of Nisan (which would be about the middle of March) was the time for beginning the journey fixed by Zerubbabel and his colleagues, amongst whom Joshua, the chief priest, held a high position. As the day approached the faithful streamed in from every quarter, many of them escorted from their respective villages by music. Rich presents of provisions and beasts of burden were given them, and prayers for their welfare were sent after them. Many of them also brought contributions towards the rebuilding of the temple received from the fellow-believers they left behind, or even from the heathens themselves.

As the day drew near the concourse at the trysting place perpetually grew, and stray caravans still continued to arrive and pitch their tents. Crowds of Jews and heathens were attracted by curiosity or interest to the spot. At last there was no one else to wait for, and all reason for deferring the departure was at an end. Then Zerubbabel was solemnly proclaimed governor of Judæa by the representatives of the Persian king, and he on his side took the oath of allegiance, and testified his gratitude for the favours of Cyrus. Then a great shout of joy proclaimed that the apparatus of the temple had been handed over to Zerubbabel and entrusted by him to the priests.

The following day the huge caravan broke up. The air was all astir with waving branches, brothers and sisters sobbed a long farewell, troop after troop followed the lead, and above all the tumult rang out the sacred music of the priests, the rumbling drums, the clanging trumpets, and the triumphant songs of the faithful. In the midst of the

procession were the leaders, Zerubbabel and the priests, with the sacred utensils, escorted by a troop of a thousand Persian cavalry commissioned to establish the exiles in the lawful possession of Jerusalem and its territory, and to give their neighbours clearly to understand that it was the king's pleasure to assign the Jews an abode in their ancient country.

Thus was the journey begun, a journey of several, nay of many months' duration. Eighty years afterwards Ezra, with a much smaller caravan, required four months to reach Jerusalem,¹ and an expedition so much larger must have taken a considerably longer time. What a weary journey! How often the enthusiasm of this or that band of travellers must have sunk away when the burning sand of the desert scorched them, when thirst already tortured, and hunger threatened to destroy them! How bitterly many of them were disappointed! Had not the prophets declared that Yahweh would make a way through the desert for the weary ones? Had he not said:² "Fear not, O Jacob! When you go through the water I will be with you; through rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you go through the fire it shall not burn you, and the flame shall not consume you. For your sake will I do a new thing in the earth. I will make a way through the wilderness and make rivers in the desert; and the very jackals and ostriches shall praise me, for I shall make waters flow through the desert to give drink to my chosen, my people." What had come of all these promises now? Alas! full many a believer, trusting in the power of his god, had entered upon the journey with no proper provision and now perished miserably. Many a mother must have laid her child under the burning desert sand. And still they went on and on! Poets would try to breathe fresh courage into their comrades' hearts, and would

¹ Ezra vii. 9.

² Isaiah xliii. 1, 2, 19, 20.

remind them of Israel's past experience of Yahweh's faithfulness :—

When Israel came out of Egypt,
The house of Jacob from a land of foreign tongue,
Then Judah was his sanctuary
And Israel his kingdom.
When the sea saw this it fled ;
The Jordan drew aback.
The mountains leapt like rams ;
The hills like lambs.
What was it, O sea, that thou shouldst flee,
And Jordan, that thou shouldst draw back ?
Why did ye leap like rams, ye mountains,
And like young sheep, ye hills ?
Let the earth tremble before Yahweh's face,
Before the face of the god of Jacob,
Who turned the rock to a flood of water,
The flint-stone to a well !¹

The prophets still roused the weary and stirred the enthusiasm of the dejected. In Jerusalem, they said, the salvation of their god, the Messianic kingdom, awaited them. "How beautiful are his feet upon the mountains who brings glad tidings, and theirs who say to Sion : Your god is king ! Hark to the voice of thy watchmen crying and shouting aloud, for they see with their very eyes that Yahweh comes back to Sion. Shout for joy, ye ruins of Jerusalem ! Yahweh is comforting his people and redeeming Jerusalem. He has made bare his holy arm before all the nations ; the whole earth is witness of the triumph of our god."² On, still on, went the travellers. Consoled or despondent, believing or despairing ; those who had not turned back within the first few days had now no choice but

¹ Psalms cxiv.

² Isaiah lii. 7—10.

to go on till they came to Judæa. When once they were there all their misery would be forgotten, and they would rejoice in Yahweh's gracious support.

Of course the exiles found their country in a miserable condition. Cities and villages lay in ruins, the fields were for the most part uncultivated, the thickets swarmed with beasts of prey, the scattered population had relapsed almost into savagery, the surrounding tribes were hostile or suspicious. The Edomites were especially bitter. It appears that Nebuchadrezzar had granted their prince a portion of the land of Judah in return for his services at the siege and sack of Jerusalem. At any rate the greater part of Southern Judah, up to Hebron, was occupied by Edomites, and of course they were slow to recognise the rights of any former possessors of the soil. Such was the country to which the wearied exiles returned. As soon as their feet were upon the land of their fathers, they set about discovering the places to which they respectively traced their origin, and since most of them belonged to families of more or less distinction, they aimed at recovering their ancestral possessions and so providing themselves with the means of support.

But when they had devoted a few weeks to these tasks, the seventh month approached, and as many of them as could possibly do so assembled at Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. The redeemed of Yahweh must join with enthusiasm in the feast, though the sight of the mount of the temple, covered with ruins, might fill them with sadness, and though the perils that surrounded them made them feel now almost more than in Babylon "a worm of Jacob." Under the orders of Joshua the priests had already cleared away the ruins and reared an altar on the spot on which the great altar of burnt offerings had stood. Though the rebuilding of the temple was not yet begun, though the

straightened circumstances of the people forbade their even thinking of the work as yet, still the altar at least was built, and it should not want for victims. Not only was the festive offering laid upon the flames, but as far as possible all the other ancient usages were also revived. The daily sacrifice at morn and evening, the offerings at the new moon, and the freewill offerings to Yahweh were all made. Their god had redeemed them and they would not forsake him; poor as they were they would yet honour him. And what had they to fear if he were gracious to them?

The golden age, the day of Yahweh's pleasure, would put all fear to flight! "Sing joyously," cried a prophet, likening the devastated and depopulated land to a childless woman,¹ "Sing joyously, thou barren one! Rejoice, O thou who didst never give birth to child! For the children of the desolate are more than those of the wife, says Yahweh. Make wide your tent, extend the curtains of your dwellings, and stint not. Lengthen the cords and make strong the tent-pegs, for right and left shall ye spread; your posterity shall expel the heathen and reinhabit the devastated cities. Fear not, for thou shalt not be put to shame; thou shalt not blush for confusion, but shalt rather forget the reproach of thy youth and remember no more the shame of thy widowhood. For thy husband is thy creator, Yahweh of hosts is his name. Thy redeemer is Israel's Holy One, and he shall be invoked as the god of all the earth.

"For Yahweh has called you, as a grieved and deserted woman, as the wife of one's youth that has been forsaken; says your god. A little while did I leave thee, but with great pity do I draw thee to me. In vehement wrath have I hidden my face for a moment; but with eternal love do I pity thee; says Yahweh, thy redeemer. Now shall it be as it was with the waters of Noah; as I swore then that the flood should

¹ Isaiah liv.

no more cover the earth, so I swear now to be no more wrath with thee nor threaten thee. For mountains may move and hills be shaken, but my love to thee shall not move, my covenant of peace shall not be shaken ; says Yahweh who pities thee.

“ O thou afflicted, tossed with the tempest and unconsoled, I will set thy stones in precious cement and found thee upon sapphires. I will make thy battlements rubies, thy gates carbuncles, and all thy district precious stones. All thy sons shall be taught by Yahweh, and great shall be the peace of thy children. Through righteousness shalt thou be established. Be not thou troubled, for thou hast nought to fear ; be not in terror, for the evil shall not come nigh thee. Even as the smith blows upon the fire and prepares his tools for work,¹ so do I create the destroyer who works destruction. Every weapon prepared against thee is powerless ; every tongue that accuses thee shall be put to shame. Such is the portion of Yahweh's servants, the reward I give them ; says Yahweh.”

With these expectations the exiles had returned from Babylon, and with these they faced the unknown future.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

EZRA III. 7—IV. 5, V., VI. ; HAGGAI ; ZECHARIAH II.—IV. ; JOEL.

THE writer of the book of Ezra represents the exiles as beginning to rebuild the temple immediately after the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, and tells us that the foundations of the sanctuary were laid with solemn rejoicings as early as the second month in the year after their

¹ After an amended version.

return. But this account is highly improbable. We must remember what was involved in seriously undertaking the task and not merely playing with it. It meant, to begin with, clearing away the heaps of rubbish, hewing a vast number of great blocks of stone, and bringing down thousands of cedar trunks from Lebanon, with the help of the Phœnicians. The Jews could not possibly meet all these expenses in a few months. Besides, the writer of Ezra, who lived two centuries and a half after the events he records, evidently mixed up the accounts he drew from his authorities, and confused different periods together. Thus, he tells us that it was the opposition of the neighbouring tribes that prevented the work from going on at once; and, in confirmation of this statement, he cites a letter written not in the reign of Cyrus, but in that of Artaxerxes, one of the successors of Darius!¹ We are therefore quite unable to rely upon his chronology, and shall do better to assume, in accordance with the indications in Haggai, and Zechariah, that the foundations of the temple were not laid till the fifteenth year of the return.

Indeed, there was no necessity for haste. Much as the Jews desired a temple, impossible as it was for them to conceive of the Messianic age without a magnificent house of Yahweh, all that was absolutely necessary for the moment was a centre of worship where the daily sacrifices at morn and even might be offered, and all who had made sacred vows might be able to pay them. Now they possessed all this provisionally in the altar of burnt sacrifices that they had raised in the midst of the ruins and had solemnly consecrated. Although there was no temple there was public service of Yahweh; and the truth in the account in Ezra may be taken to be that a few months after the Feast of the Tabernacles this service was regularly instituted at Jeru-

¹ Ezra iv. 6 ff.

saalem; the priests, the Levites, the singers, and all the other officials of the temple had their tasks assigned them; and, under the direction of Joshua, the high priest, were busily engaged in preparing for the restoration of the temple by clearing away the rubbish and collecting money and building materials.

The priests may have thrown their whole hearts into these preparations; but we cannot wonder that the laity, in spite of all their devotion to Yahweh, found other work more pressing than the rebuilding of the temple. It was doubtless as much as they could do to gain a living; and those who had returned from Babylonia must have been involved in many difficulties and anxieties by their relations with those they had found in possession on their arrival, and especially the Edomites, who had naturally penetrated everywhere after settling in southern Judah. Again, the Jews were sorely tried after the death of Cyrus, when his son and successor, Cambyeses, marched upon Egypt and conquered the whole country, for, of course, a province so near the seat of war as Palestine felt the pressure of varied imposts, and had to supply both men and provisions.

For the present, therefore, the building of the temple was postponed. Though the priests lost no opportunity of rebuking the listlessness of their fellow-believers, though zealous voices rose from time to time and insisted on the sacred work being done, yet Zerubbabel was for many years unable to move the people to it. Everyone admitted that it must be done—but not yet.

At last, in the year 520 B.C., when Cambyeses had died childless and, after a short period of confusion, had been succeeded by Darius the son of Hystaspes, the youthful colony was visited by a cruel famine. The rain had not fallen, the harvest had failed, and everything went ill with the Jews. Then Haggai rose as a prophet, and his words

waked an echo when he cried: "It is because the building of the temple is delayed. How can you bear to dwell in well-timbered houses yourselves, while the house of Yahweh lies in ruins? Consider what you have done, and see what it has brought upon you!" So now the work was taken in hand, and was soon sufficiently advanced for the foundations of the sanctuary to be laid.

On the twenty-fourth day of the second month of the second year of the reign of Darius there were great festivities in Jerusalem. Yahweh's help was solemnly invoked on the sacred work. The spot upon which the new sanctuary was to rise was marked off on the area, from which the rubbish had now been cleared away. A number of beams and blocks of stone were already prepared. The architects and overseers, some of them doubtless priests, were ranged round the altar. It rose in front of the spot where the portico would stand, and was already provided with the necessary washing vats and other apparatus. Then Zerubbabel addressed the people, indicated the site of the future temple, and urged them to strain all their powers in the work. The ramshorn trumpets sounded, the smoke of the sacrifices rose on high, the choir lifted up the song, "Praise Yahweh, for he is gracious and his mercy endures for ever!" cries of enthusiastic joy burst from the people's lips, every sorrow was for the moment forgotten, even the gnawing tooth of hunger was blunted, and men thought not of their scanty clothing. "Praise Yahweh" was echoed from every lip. "He will send his blessing upon us. The temple is rebuilt, the temple rebuilt! The times of David are returning. Israel is Yahweh's people. Hallelujah!"—But there were certain men of ancient days, both priests and others, who had seen the former temple that was devastated six and sixty years ago. Ah, what a glorious building it was! Those stately rows of pillars that ran round the court; those miniature

chapels and temples that filled the court itself and vied with each other in wealth and splendour; those noble obelisks, Jachin and Boaz, that rose before the sanctuary; those magazines and wardrobes, priestly abodes, bakehouses and spice booths, row upon row; that splendid dais for the king and his court; that gallery for the singers; and, above all, the sanctuary itself, with its rich adornments of cherubs and flower buds, and its countless consecrated gifts! Alas, all this—and their imagination painted it in far more glorious colours yet—all this would not return! It was well to rebuild the temple, and Yahweh would bless his people for it. The golden age would surely come, but meanwhile how wretched was the state of Israel! And at these melancholy thoughts, in the midst of the people's deafening shouts of joy, the old men wept bitterly. But the sounds of woe were drowned.¹ "Praise Yahweh!" rang from every side. "It is the temple of Yahweh, and Israel is his heritage!"

What is more common than for the pressure of actual life to quench excited feeling? Can we wonder that the people were soon considerably sobered? When they came to think it all over quietly, even those who had never beheld the former temple began to take a less rose-coloured view of the future. They were poor and wretched; the work they had undertaken was above their strength; when all was done their sanctuary would fall far short of the old one,—and the Messianic age? In that same year the prophet Haggai repeatedly attempted to rouse the people's courage. What did they mean by lamenting that this second temple would be inferior to the first? "Only be bold, Zerubbabel and Joshua, for Yahweh is with you. Full soon the golden age shall dawn, and Yahweh will then incite all peoples to bring their choicest gifts to his sanctuary. His will has sway over

¹ After an amended version.

all the gold and silver on the earth, and he will make this temple far surpass the ancient one in splendour." They must not delay the building; for, as a piece of unclean flesh desecrated everything it touched, so this one piece of negligence made all their sacrifices and all their other good works of no avail. Had not Yahweh shown them clearly enough that he was wrath with them for their sloth, by sending drought and every kind of misfortune? But now, cried the prophet, as the time of the spring rains drew near, now they might safely sow their corn, for the rain would come and days of glory were at hand. Surely the Messianic age was dawning. "Behold! O Zerubbabel, how all the kingdoms are overturned, how all their might is broken! But thou, my servant, art dear to me, and I will keep thee like a signet ring upon my hand, because I can trust thee, says Yahweh."

In his attempts to keep the zeal of the Jews alive, Haggai found a stout ally in the prophet Zechariah,¹ whose fantastic symbolism pictures the dawn of the Messianic age while he insists upon repentance. In a vision, as he expresses it, he saw a man with a measuring line. "Where are you going?" he cried to him. "To measure out the future Jerusalem" was the reply; "for it shall overflow with inhabitants and shall extend on every side. Rejoice, O daughter of Sion! for Yahweh comes to dwell in thy midst. Return, O ye who are still in exile with the daughter of Babylon! Whoso troubles you brings trouble on himself, as one who should touch the apple of my eye. Be silent, for Yahweh is roused!"—I saw, continues the prophet, Joshua the high priest, standing in foul clothes before the face of Yahweh's angel, while Satan stood by him to accuse him and to compass his fall. But Yahweh cursed Satan, clothed Joshua in clean garments,

¹ On the composition of the book that bears his name, see Vol. III., pp. 312, 313.

and gave him a holy head-dress. Thus his unrighteousness was removed. Then Yahweh's angel said to him: "Serve Yahweh and he will grant you to abide here for ever, and will make you a living sign, for 'Sprout' (that is the sprout of David, the Messiah) draws near. All unrighteousness shall be done away, and there shall be plenty everywhere."—"What see you?" said an angel, waking me from sleep. 'A golden lamp-stand with seven lamps, and a cruse of oil, and two olive trees right and left of the cruse. What is the meaning, O my lord?' 'Do you not understand it?' asked the angel. Then he explained it to me. It was Yahweh's word to Zerubbabel, that the holy work of building the temple should not be accomplished with violence, but by the spirit of Yahweh. At Zerubbabel's command the summit of the temple mount should be levelled and the keystone set. He had begun the work and he should complete it. Who so foolish as to despise the day of small beginnings?—"And who are these two olive trees," I asked again; 'who are these olive branches in the golden cruses from which there flows out gold?' 'Do you not understand?' he answered. 'They are the two olive branches which stand before the lord of all the earth.'

This last explanation can hardly have enlightened the prophet's hearers much; but they needed no further hint to understand that, as the oil in the cruse was the symbol of Yahweh's all-inspiring spirit, so these two olive trees represented Zerubbabel and Joshua, whose task it was to prepare for the Messianic kingdom. And assuredly that kingdom was at hand. Fasts were still held, as appointed, year by year; but before long mourning would be replaced by joy. Soon the inhabitants of all the cities of the earth would exhort each other to the zealous service of Yahweh, and all peoples should make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. "Then

¹ Compare Jeremiah xxiii. 5, xxxiii. 15, and p. 70.

shall ten men of diverse tongues take hold of a Jew by the flap of his garment and say: 'We will go with thee, for God is with thee.'"¹

The words of the prophets were so far successful that the work was carried on and was completed within four years. Within four years! When we remember that Solomon, whose resources were so much ampler than those of Haggai's and Zechariah's contemporaries, required seven years to complete his temple,² and that his successors repeatedly enlarged its plan, we can very well believe that the new building presented but a sorry contrast to the former one, and that the old men, who had seen the first temple, often gazed full sadly on the second.

In extent and magnificence the second temple was doubtless insignificant when compared with the first, but it was a far greater work of faith than the edifice of Solomon had been. That ostentatious monarch had given Yahweh a dwelling-place at the expense of his subjects, and had derived nothing but enjoyment and credit from it himself; whereas the second temple was the free and generous gift of a poverty-stricken people, who had borne with privations in their own hovels that they might give their god a palace; nay, they had imperilled their very existence by steadfastly refusing even to be helped in a manner which they thought would displease their god.

Upon this deed of faith we must now fix our attention.

North of the district in which the exiles settled on their return lay the former territory of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. It will be remembered that this district had been to a great extent depopulated two centuries before, and especially, we may suppose, in the neighbourhood of Samaria, which would naturally suffer most in the war. Accordingly,

¹ Zechariah viii. 19—23.

² 1 Kings vi. 38.

one of the kings of Assyria, perhaps Shalmaneser,¹ but more probably Esar-haddon,² had repopulated the district by colonies from Cuthah and other Babylonian cities; and the Babylonian colonists had united with the Israelites, and even adopted their religion. These facts are preserved in a highly characteristic narrative in the book of Kings,³ which runs as follows: "The colonists did not serve Yahweh; so he sent lions amongst them, and many of them were devoured." This reminded them of their neglect to give his due to the god of the country, and they begged the king of Assyria to give them an Israelitish priest to teach them how to serve this god and deliver themselves from the beasts of prey. Their request was complied with, and ever after they served Yahweh, though they also retained their own religious usages and their own deities, five of whom are enumerated. Their Yahweh-worship, therefore, was of the heathenish type, for which the historian condemns them severely.

Such is the naïve account in which we are informed that the Babylonian colonists adopted the worship of Yahweh from the Israelites. Since Josiah's reformation was not without its influence in the north,⁴ we may be sure that the heathen practices of these immigrants were gradually superseded, and that the sacrifice of children for instance was abolished from amongst them. After the fall of Jerusalem we hear of a band of pilgrims from Shiloh, Shechem, and Samaria,⁵ going in mourning garments to visit the ruins of the sanctuary. Some of them it will be observed came from the territory of the Cuthæans. From a religious point of view, then, there was not much difference between these Babylonians and the northern Israelites on the one hand and the new population of Judæa on the other.

¹ 2 Kings xvii. 24, compared with *vv.* 3 ff.

² Ezra iv. 2.

³ 2 Kings xvii. 24—41.

⁴ Compare Vol. III., p. 433.

⁵ Jeremiah xli. 5.

These Cuthæans, or Samaritans as they were afterwards called, seem to have been on unfriendly terms with the northern Israelites. At any rate they did not act in concert with them after the return of the exiles. Probably the Israelites rejected them as strangers, and refused to act in harmony with them. This may have prepared them to some extent for the reception they met when they offered their friendship to the exiles who had returned from Babylonia. Their action in the matter shows their sincerity, for they had no material advantage to reap from permission to join in building Yahweh's temple, which was what they wanted. Their only desire was to be recognised as true worshippers of Yahweh and received into Israel. "Since Esar-haddon's days," they said to the Jewish leaders, "we have served Yahweh, and we desire to do so still. May we not help you in building a house for him?"

To understand the sacrifice which Zerubbabel and Joshua made in refusing this request, we must reflect what great advantages the proffered aid would have brought them. In the first place the task was almost beyond their strength; so that anything that lightened it would be extremely welcome; and in the next place their southern boundary was already exposed to the ceaseless hostility of the Edomites, which made it all the more important to secure the friendship of their northern neighbours, for if they incurred their enmity also they would be lodged between two fires. The Cuthæans, moreover, separated them from their northern brethren, whose alliance they could not fail to desire, on condition of compliance with their religious laws. There must have been very conclusive reasons then to induce the leaders to reject the hand of fellowship extended to them, and doubtless many of the Jews would eagerly have grasped it.

Then why did the majority reject the Samaritans after all? According to the book of Ezra they alleged the pretext

that it was only the Jews to whom Cyrus had given permission to build the temple ; as if the king had intended to prohibit them from availing themselves of any help they could get in their work ! Their true reason, however, may readily be guessed. These Cuthæans were not of Israelite extraction, and Israel must not intermarry with strangers. Had not this very offence, according to their books of law and history, been the most fruitful source of misery and apostacy from primeval times ? Yahweh would indeed bless his people, but only on condition that they were faithful to him, and entered into no alliance with other peoples.

This refusal on the part of the Jews was a deed of faith, and there is certainly something noble in it. But on the other hand it need hardly be said that their conduct breathes an unhallowed spirit of exclusiveness and national pride. Moreover, it is in palpable contradiction with Zechariah's expectations that the heathens would come and enrich the temple of Yahweh. But it does not follow that Zechariah thought otherwise of the offer of the Samaritans than Zerubabel and Joshua did. Far from it. It was one thing, in the fervour of his discourse, to picture all the heathens coming submissively and reverentially to beseech the help of Yahweh's people when visibly protected and blessed by him ; but it was a very different thing to have to admit that Yahweh's people was so poor and downcast as to be glad to purchase the help of heathens by allowing them equal rights with Israel. The one conception was flattering to the national vanity, the other was a deep humiliation.

This refusal produced its natural consequences. The Samaritans were offended by the haughtiness of the Jews, and hated them with an intensity proportioned to the zeal with which they had sought their friendship. Thus a feeling of hostility arose which subsequently caused incalculable injury and pain to Samaritans and Jews alike. It increased with

the growth of that spirit of exclusiveness which kept gathering strength amongst the Jews henceforth, it was kept up with equal bitterness on both sides, and did not end until the two peoples had sunk below each other's horizons.

It appears that the disappointed Samaritans instantly attempted to hinder the Jews from building the temple at all, since they would not let them help. But at first they had no success. The governor of Syria, whose suspicions they aroused, inquired in a hostile spirit into the nature of the work that the Jews were executing in Jerusalem, but they were able to refer to the permission given them by Cyrus. Indeed, according to the book of Ezra, the original edict of the king was found at Ecbatana, in Media; but in any case the work Zerubbabel was doing was of too innocent a character to have called for the interposition of the Persian governor. So the temple, as we have seen, was completed without the help and even in the face of the opposition of the Samaritans, and was then consecrated by Israel with festal sacrifices and cries of joy, while the Passover was celebrated for seven days in gladness of spirit. All this was done by the true "Israel," the people of the twelve tribes, for the Jews considered themselves its representatives. On occasion of the feast of consecration they expressed this thought by dedicating to Yahweh twelve goats as a sin offering, after the number of the tribes.¹

So Israel was again established, with the house of God as its consecrated centre. Would not the Messianic age now dawn at last?

Such was the dream of many a Jew; for there were still enthusiasts who, hoping against hope, still promised Israel the richest blessings and threatened the enemies of the Lord's people with humiliation and destruction. A remarkable example is furnished by the book of Joel. The prophet

¹ Ezra vi. 17, viii. 35.

of this name takes occasion by a plague of locusts, in which he sees an announcement of Yahweh's coming day of judgment, to exhort his countrymen. "In the last days," he exclaims, "In the last days, says Yahweh, I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions; while your very slaves and slave-girls shall receive my spirit. Then will I give signs in heaven and upon earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great day of Yahweh's judgment comes. But in that day whosoever invokes the name of the Lord shall escape the judgment, for on Sion and in Jerusalem there shall be a refuge for all who cry unto Yahweh. And behold, when Judah and Jerusalem are blessed once more, then will I assemble all the heathens in the valley of Jehoshaphat (that is *Yahweh judges*), where sentence shall be pronounced and executed on them because they have scattered my people and taken them away captive, and parted my land and sold the inhabitants as slaves for a paltry price." Not only Judah's oppressors who had taken the people captive, but her neighbours also, and particularly the Phœnicians, who had sold the Judæans as slaves to the Greeks, should bear a heavy punishment, and should be sold to the Arabians in their turn by the people of Yahweh. The prophet waxes ever hotter in his wrath and cries, "Call the heathen to battle; let their heroes come forth. Beat your spades into swords and your scythes into spears! Let the feeble cry, 'I am mighty,' and assemble all together!—O Yahweh, send thine angel down!—There come the heathens advancing to the valley of Jehoshaphat! But there I sit, says Yahweh, to pronounce my sentence upon them. How they crowd through the valley of judgment! The day of Yahweh is at hand. Sun and moon are darkened,

and the stars have lost their sight. Yahweh roars from Sion and thunders from Jerusalem, and heaven and earth tremble. But he is a refuge for his people. Thus shall ye know that I, Yahweh, am your god, who dwell upon Sion and whose sanctuary is Jerusalem, Jerusalem that shall never more be trodden by the stranger's foot. Then shall the mountains all flow with wine and the hills with milk; then shall all Judah's streams be full of water; then shall a fountain spring from the house of Yahweh, and water the region round. Then shall Egypt be devastated and Edom laid waste, because they afflicted Judah; but Judah shall abide for ever, Jerusalem from generation to generation, for Yahweh dwells in Sion!"

These were bold words to utter, and they bear witness to a fervid faith!

But alas! the Messianic age, which was proclaimed with such passionate confidence, did not come. We know very little of the first fifty years after the rebuilding of the temple, but that little is dreary in the extreme. It is true that besides rebuilding the temple the Jews restored the city walls; but we afterwards find them in ruins again, and Jerusalem utterly dismantled. Even Zerubbabel's position was anything but a brilliant one, for he was only the servant of the Persian king under supervision of the governor of Syria, yet he enjoyed far more consideration than any of his successors did. As the scion of David's house, he represented the glorious past, and was, as it were, the visible pledge of an equally joyous future, and upon him accordingly the eyes of his countrymen were fixed in hope. But this was not the case with his successors. We do not so much as know the names of any of them, and may therefore presume that none of them were men of any note or members of the house of David. The succession of high priests was kept up and their power steadily increased; but much as the

Jews were attached to their forms of worship, the magnificence of the high priest was no substitute for the regal splendour of the Messianic age.

We can well suppose what the fate of the Jews would be. When once the Samaritans had called the Syrian governor's attention to the love of freedom which had always marked the inhabitants of Jerusalem, he would look with suspicion upon the rebuilding of the city walls, and would rejoice to see them destroyed in any petty hostilities between the Jews and the Edomites or Samaritans. It is even possible that some kind of Messianic agitation furnished the occasion for building the castle on the mount of the temple, north of the sanctuary, which was at first called Baris, and afterwards Antonia.¹ From time to time a small Persian garrison was stationed in this castle. The taxes were levied with inexorable rigour, and if anyone resisted the king's authority, short measures were taken with him; a rafter from his own house served as his gallows, and his home was laid in ruins.² Deputy governors would be expressly selected from amongst the least patriotic Jews, and would sometimes even be strangers.

Thus Judah sank and sank. As to their personal lot the Jews had perhaps not much to complain of, but all whose ideal extended beyond individual prosperity were often smitten with deep grief. The prophet Zechariah had once exclaimed: "O Yahweh of war-hosts! Wilt thou not take pity on Jerusalem and Judah's cities with which thou hast been wrath these seventy years?" but not one of the "fair words of comfort" in which Yahweh's angel replied³ had yet been accomplished. The tension of feeling which had enabled the Jews to rebuild the temple and the city walls and to refuse the help of the Samaritans was now relaxed. List-

¹ See Map IV.

² Compare Ezra vi. 11.

³ Zechariah i. 12.

⁴ v. 13.

lessness had taken its place ; and those whose religious feelings were deepest often asked in sore perplexity, "Is Yahweh faithless after all?"

The sense of mingled joy in Israel's redemption from captivity, and bitter disappointment at the delay of the Messianic age, is reflected in several psalms which may be assigned with probability to this period. One of them is Psalm lxxxv.

O Yahweh, thou hast been gracious to thy land
In bringing back the captives of Jacob ;
Thou hast forgiven thy people's iniquity
And covered all their sins.
Thou hast put all thy wrath aside,
And withdrawn from thy fierce displeasure.
Restore us, then, O god of our salvation !
And remove thine anger from us.
Wilt thou be wrath against us for ever,
And extend thy fury from generation to generation ?
Wilt thou not revive us again,
That thy people may rejoice in thee ?
O Yahweh, show us thy grace,
And grant us thy salvation !
Let me hear the words of god Yahweh,
For he promises peace to his people, his loved ones,
That they may not return to folly.
Surely his redemption is nigh them that fear him,
That glory may come to our land.
Then shall mercy and faithfulness meet together ;
Righteousness and peace shall kiss one another.
Faithfulness shall spring up from the earth,
And righteousness shall look down from heaven.

Yahweh shall prosper us,
And our land shall bring forth increase.
May righteousness go out before him
And follow in his footsteps !

So sang the poet, hoping against hope. His sweet words might soothe and strengthen his hearers for a time ; but the stern reality soon reasserted itself, plunging them into deeper despondency than ever, and adding strength to their distracting doubts.

CHAPTER XIV.

IS NOT YAHWEH RIGHTEOUS ?

THE BOOK OF JOB.

THE believer has no more precious treasure than his faith. As long as he retains it he can bear all things, but if he loses it the world soon grows too hard for him. And this is why the devout Israelites, as we have already seen,¹ had felt such agony of soul ever since the mournful reality had come so sharply into contrast with their faith. Yahweh, the god of gods, nay, the one living and almighty God, had chosen Israel for his heritage, and was able and willing to protect and bless his people. Such was their faith ; but ever since Josiah, the zealous worshipper of Yahweh, had purified his people's religion from the stain of heathenism, and had then fallen, a few years afterwards, in battle ; ever since Judah, though turning to Yahweh and renouncing the service of all other gods, had been reduced to slavery, one mystery had followed another. There was Judah's continued dependence upon the stranger, though the Chaldæan power had followed the Egyptian, and the Persian the Chaldæan ; there was the

¹ See p. 10.

fall of Jerusalem, in spite of the most confident assurances of the prophets that Yahweh would come to the rescue; there was the release of the exiles by the favour of a heathen prince who was simply consulting his own interest in the measure,—for such was the sober view of the event which must have gradually spread amongst the people; there was the return, without the visible tokens of Yahweh's support which the prophets had foretold, but in the midst of privations and at the cost of many a precious life; and finally, there was the present miserable poverty, dissension, and slavery, with Jerusalem, the holy city, thinly populated and half in ruins, and with enemies on every side. How could the traditional faith in Yahweh stand against all this ?

The careless spirit of mockery which had made men cry, in the days of their prosperity, "He never existed, and no harm can come to us,"¹ now taught them to deny his government, and declare that he never troubled himself about the affairs of men; but more serious minds were racked by doubts as to Yahweh's justice. Then as now and always people in general were shallow enough to be satisfied with superficial answers, but those who followed out their thoughts were tortured by the grievous problems which the facts of life had forced upon their faith.

Many found a kind of satisfaction in the thought that Yahweh was punishing them for the sins of their fathers. In the early years after Josiah's death it was often said that Manasseh's idolatry had stirred the wrath of Yahweh so deeply that not even the people's repentance could appease him. Such was the view of the author of Kings,² and indeed of Jeremiah himself, for he did not deny the justice of the proverb current amongst his murmuring contemporaries, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's

¹ Jeremiah v. 12.

² 2 Kings xxi. 10—15, xxiii. 26, xxiv. 3.

teeth are set on edge.”¹ In much the same spirit the later prophets also explain the national misery and humiliation as the result of national wickedness. The Second Isaiah, for instance, cries,² “ Who gave Jacob over to spoil, and Israel to the robbers ? It was Yahweh, against whom we have sinned, whose commandments we refused to accomplish, whose law we would not hear.” So, too, Zechariah³ declares that Yahweh commanded his people to be righteous and merciful, to succour widows and orphans, and plot no evil one against another ; but when they refused to obey him, and would not listen to the exhortations of the prophets, then his wrath burst over them. They had been deaf to his voice until he, in his turn, was deaf to their entreaties, and swept them away amongst the heathens to unknown lands, while their own lay waste. In harmony with this explanation of the national adversity, we heard Haggai but now ascribing the famine to the delay in rebuilding the temple.

The old answer, then, was still repeated on every hand, “ National suffering is the punishment of national sin ; ” but we need not be surprised at its not satisfying everyone ; and in itself it is obviously false. No rational connection can be established between the idolatry of Manasseh and the defeat of Josiah, or in general between the sins and the sufferings of Israel. Nor were these national sufferings the only enigma. The private lot of men presented many features that no one could reconcile with the righteous government of God. The ordinary doctrine that the good enjoyed prosperity, while the wicked were overtaken by adversity, was often in glaring contradiction with the facts. The great mass of people might hold it as a matter of routine belief ; but anyone who thought it out was driven into doubt and the recognition of his own ignorance. It was but natural

¹ Jeremiah xv. 4, xxxi. 29.

² Isaiah xlii. 24.

³ Zechariah vii. 8 ff.

that many of the "sages" should find themselves in this position. Jeremiah tells¹ us that even in his time the sages were ashamed, confounded, and dismayed; but he is content with the ready, though shallow, explanation that inasmuch as they had rejected Yahweh's word their wisdom must necessarily come to nought. And indeed a prophet and preacher of repentance like Jeremiah was not at all the man to understand and appreciate the sages. The cause of their confusion was not that they had disobeyed the word of Yahweh, but that facts were in contradiction with the current doctrine as to Yahweh's righteousness, and those whose office led them deliberately to examine what they saw and felt, perceived this contradiction sooner than the prophets; for doubt is fatal to the glow of inspiration, and the prophets were therefore instinctively conservative and unwilling to question or reject the traditional faith of their ancestors.

To a sage, who reviewed the great question of God's justice with singular intrepidity, we owe a work which is one of the greatest glories of Israelitish literature, namely, the book of Job. Opinions differ widely as to the date of its composition. Some scholars believe it was written in Manasseh's time, some place it soon after Josiah, whether during the Captivity or just before it; others again would bring it down to the first century after the return, and others later still. In placing it here, and treating it before we come to Ezra, I do not mean to say that I am by any means sure that it was written at exactly this period, though there is much to support the opinion that it was; but at any rate the circumstances of the Jews at this time were eminently suited to make thoughtful men consider and discuss the perplexing question that furnishes the subject matter of the book.

Let us examine its contents.

¹ Jeremiah viii. 9.

The first two chapters contain the following story :—

There dwelt in the land of Uz, the wilderness north of Edom, a man of blameless piety whose name was Job. He had great possessions in cattle and slaves, and had seven sons and three daughters. His children led a luxurious life, and feasted from time to time in the houses of each of the brothers in turn ; but when the festivities were over, their father would send for them to sanctify them and make sacrifices on behalf of each, for who could tell that they had not committed some offence in the midst of their merry-making ? So scrupulous was Job in his piety !

But on a certain day the angels came to present themselves before Yahweh in heaven, and amongst them came Satan, the accuser of men. Then Yahweh asked him whence he came, and he replied that he had wandered over all the earth. He brought many accusations against men ; to which Yahweh answered : “ But have you considered my servant Job ? for no mortal equals him in blameless piety and virtue.” Then Satan answered mockingly, “ What wonder ? Does Job serve God for nothing ? You have hedged him round with protection, and you prosper him in all he undertakes ! But put out your hand and take away his treasures, and he will deny you to your very face !” But Yahweh would not so soon relinquish the pride he took in his faithful servant, and in the conviction that Job would nobly bear the test, he gave the accuser permission to do whatever he chose with the pious man’s possessions ; only he must not touch his person. Then Satan went out, intent on compassing the fall of Job.

Blow after blow now fell upon him. Once, as he sat before his house, while his children were feasting with their eldest brother, a messenger rushed into his presence with the news, “ Arabs have seized your oxen and asses and put all your slaves to death, and I have escaped alone to tell

you!" While he was yet speaking, there came another with the tidings, "Lightning has struck your flocks, and all the sheep and shepherds are dead, and I have escaped alone to tell you!" The words were still on his lips when a third came up and cried, "Marauding Chaldeans have surprised your camels and carried them away and have killed all the slaves, and I have escaped alone to tell you." Finally, a fourth messenger hurried into his presence with the overwhelming tidings, "The house in which your children were feasting has been thrown down by a whirlwind, and every one in it killed, and I have escaped alone to tell you!" Utterly broken down by all these blows Job flung himself upon the ground. With his garments rent and his head shorn, a prey to intensest grief, he burst into the wail: "Naked was I born and naked shall I return," but immediately added the words of acquiescence, "Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken away; blessed be Yahweh's name!"

Again the angels gathered together before Yahweh, and Satan was amongst them. Yahweh asked him, as before, whence he came, and again he answered, "From wandering about on the earth." Then Yahweh asked triumphantly, "And what say you now to my servant Job? Has any man such piety as his? He still clings to it, though you moved me to ruin him!" But Satan was not so easily driven off the field. "There is nothing wonderful in his conduct yet," he replied; "for he is afraid of his life, and a man will give anything for that. Only touch him with disease, and he will renounce you to your face." "Go your way," said Yahweh, with unshaken confidence in Job; "do what you will with him, but spare his life."

So the accuser went his way, and smote Job with a loathsome leprosy. Covered with sores from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, tortured by an intolerable itching, and shunned as unclean by all men, he sat alone upon

the ash-heap by his house. Then his wife came and added yet another to his woes by her bitter words, "Do you still hold fast to your piety? What can it do for you now? Renounce God and die!" But Job, in all his torture, still replied, "You speak like a senseless woman! Are we to receive good from the hands of God and not to receive evil?" So in spite of all his sufferings not one foolish word escaped the lips of Job.

Now when his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar heard of his adversity, they all came to testify their sympathy and offer their consolations. But when they saw him and could hardly recognise him in his frightful state, they could only rend their clothes, put ashes on their heads, and weep aloud. Then they sat down by him seven whole days, dumb with consternation, because his misery was so crushing.

Such were the sufferings of the pious Job.

The writer probably borrowed some of the features of this narrative from a popular tradition concerning a pious sufferer of the name of Job; for Ezekiel mentions a man of this name, together with Noah and Daniel, as a model of piety,¹ though he does not appear to have been acquainted with our book of Job. It is of no great consequence, however, whether the writer borrowed much or little from tradition, for the character of the story itself shows us that he gave free play to his own imagination. His representation of Job's disasters as resulting from the instigations of Satan, who does not believe in disinterested virtue, was based upon a popular belief which the poet himself had outgrown. His only purpose in adopting it was to set clearly before the thoughts of his countrymen the great enigma of a pious man's sufferings.

Before going on to trace the main development of the sequel of this work, we must observe that it has not come down to us in its original form. In the first place the

¹ Ezekiel xiv. 14, 20.

Hebrew, as we now have it, is in many passages quite unintelligible ; and in the next place various longer or shorter passages, some of which seriously interfere with the right comprehension of the work, have been inserted. The original book of Job probably consisted of chapters i.—xxvii. 10, xxviii.—xxxi, xxxviii.—xli. 12, xlii. 1—6. We must therefore exclude the so-called discourse of Elihu, xxxii.—xxxvii., and the conclusion xlii. 7—17, besides a few passages of less importance (xxvii. 11—28, xli. 18—34). The motives which led to the composition and insertion of these passages we shall discuss presently. Meanwhile, let us confine ourselves to the original work.

In the picturesque and graphic scenes at the beginning of the book the poet sets a great problem before his readers. No thoughtful believer who beheld a good man in adversity could suppress the painful question : “ How can we reconcile this with Yahweh’s justice ? Are Yahweh’s doings good ? ” These are the questions which the poet makes Job and his friends discuss. Job complains of the ways of God ; his friends defend the old doctrine as to Yahweh’s justice ; and, finally, Yahweh himself gives judgment. Job represents the doubter, the censor of God’s ways. In his inmost heart indeed he clings to the Almighty, and has far more genuine piety than his friends, but his attitude is anything but that of passive endurance. There is a contradiction, therefore, between the introduction, in which he is represented as eminently patient, and the dialogues that follow, in which he indulges in passionate complaints and accusations of God. This contradiction is so marked as to induce many scholars to reject the introduction as a later addition ; and in any case it is a blemish in the book regarded as a work of art, though one which it would have been difficult to avoid, since the writer could hardly lay his doubts upon any other lips

than those of the sufferer himself. Let us try to forget this contradiction, then, and gather up the substance of the dialogues.

But before doing so, we must caution our readers against the impression made by simply studying the Authorised Version. The translation is so hopelessly incorrect and obscure as almost completely to disguise the real meaning of the poem; and in some passages the sense it gives is exactly the opposite of what stands in the original. As a single example we may give the passage in which Job declares that since God has already determined to kill him, it does not matter what he says. Job's words are, "He will slay me! I have no hope." But the Authorised Version gives them, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."¹ With this warning we may now proceed to the dialogues themselves.

After sitting down in silence with his friends for seven days, Job burst at last into a violent imprecation upon the day of his birth. His only longing was for death. What was the value of life when coupled with such misery as his? He had no rest or cessation from agony; torture was ever added to torture.—His friends opened their eyes in amazement to hear such words. Who would have thought that a pious man like Job would give way to such bitter complaints? Eliphaz began to answer with the hesitation we always feel in addressing one who is heavily afflicted. It might be painful to Job, he said, to be contradicted; but he could not refrain from opposing a few words to what he had said. He would only repeat what Job himself had always urged upon others in like circumstances, and implore him to seek his own consolation in it now. An innocent man never perished, but evil befell the wicked. Then he demonstrated with ludicrous minuteness, as though it were a startling discovery of his own, that all men were sinful. A spirit had told him

¹ Job xiii. 15. Compare p. 163.

so in a fearsome vision by night ! Job's only course was to leave the matter with God, who could make the mourners glad, and deliver those that despised not his chastisement. Such was the fruit, he concluded, of their reflections, and he hoped that Job would find consolation in it !

But it seemed that the sufferer was not so easily consoled. On the other hand, the only result of what Eliphaz had said was to stir his anger against his friends. How heartless they were to worry him with these commonplaces, without once sounding the depths of his misery ! He was utterly shattered ; and what had he done to deserve it all ?

Aye ! the service man serves upon earth is hard,
Like a labourer's day is his life.
As a slave sighs for the shades of even,
As a hireling waits for his hire,
So are months of misery measured to me,
And nights of woe appointed.

And then life was so short ! That made his sufferings all the harder to bear, for when once he was dead it would all be over with him. Why must God rise up against him ? Well might the poet¹ say : " What is man that thou art mindful of him ? " God was mindful indeed of man, but only to torture him. Even suppose he had sinned, what harm could that do Him ? He might well overlook the trespasses of a poor mortal whose life would pass away so swiftly.

Then the friends perceived that Job's complaint was no mere cry of agony, but was largely due to deliberate doubt as to God's righteousness, and without the least perception of the truth contained in his hard sayings they girt on their weapons to put this doubt to silence. So Bildad took up the discourse, and began by expressing his lively indignation. It was a shame to utter such words ! God pervert the right ?

¹ Psalm viii. 4. Compare Vol. I., p. 51.

Impossible ! The fathers had always taught that he was righteous. It was certain, absolutely certain.

When thus referred to the teaching of the fathers, Job retorted that he knew it well enough himself without their telling him, and that he also knew how God was always justified. Of course He was, cried the sufferer with growing bitterness. How could it be otherwise ? He could do whatever He chose, and who could resist Him ? It was of no avail to plead with Him. Even if a man had right on his side against Him, all he could do was to implore His grace, which was much the safest course. But as for him, what did he care for his life ? It was worth nothing to him now, so he would say right out what he really felt. And, put into a few words, it came to this : God destroyed the righteous and the wicked alike ! And that would matter little if He did but destroy them quickly, instead of taking delight in torturing the innocent ! The wicked ruled the earth ; and if that was not God's doing, whose doing was it ? Nay, why should he not say what he really meant ? for he was condemned already. God had made him, and then resolved to lie in wait for him to punish him as soon as He caught him in the smallest trespass. It was ungenerous in God so to torture a poor, weak creature, whose life was short !

Of course, the friends could not allow such language to pass unchallenged. Zophar now took up the discourse : What a flood of words, he cried ; what mighty language ! Did Job suppose he had a monopoly of wisdom ? If God himself were but to speak to him, he would soon see that he had been far too lightly punished as yet. Instead of all this arrogance he had better repent, and all might yet be well ; but otherwise the only refuge of the wicked was death.

Since his friends were evidently completely out of sympathy with him, and were quite unable to perceive how enigmatical his sufferings must be pronounced when regarded

from the traditional point of view, Job became more and more impatient of their words. Yes truly, they were the first real sages that had ever lived, and when they died wisdom would die with them ! As if he did not know all they had told him ! He knew the old story as well as they did. God was wise, was he not ? and mighty. Wise and mighty ! Yes, indeed, and He turned everything upside down, and so abused His might. But as for him, he would plead against God himself. *They* were bent on keeping the Almighty their friend, and so they simply applauded whatever He did. But God was not served by such lies, and would punish them some day for uttering all this nonsense about Him. But as for himself, he was condemned already, so he would say how things really stood, and say it to God himself. Man was a miserable creature of few days. For a tree, when cut down, might sprout again ; but when a man fell, he fell for ever, and dead men rose no more. If a man could return from the realms of death it would be another thing ; but that was impossible. And suppose his children after him were prosperous, what good was that to him ? All he asked to know was how God could answer for all this.

Job's words sounded more and more blasphemous in the ears of his friends, and they did not cease to tell him so. Five times they tried to bring him to repentance, and each time they laid less stress upon the reward of virtue, and more upon the punishment of sin. But they had nothing fresh to urge, nothing but an appeal to the old doctrine. Of course this failed to satisfy the doubter, and the tone in which he answered these flatterers of God grew constantly more bitter. It was a lie that sin was punished. What countless abominations were committed without God's ever giving them a thought ! Indeed, the impious were often highly prosperous, respected all their lives, and honoured down to their very death. Did their children gather the bitter fruits of their

misdeeds ? What harm was that to them ? The sinner ought to feel the blow himself, and then God would be just. Amidst all his indignant protests, Job had still one hope—that he might be allowed to speak with God himself. At the bottom of his heart he still cherished the belief that God could some way justify himself, and at least would take his side as against his friends. Why had not God appointed certain days of judgment upon which to defend himself ? As it was, man stood bewildered in the face of all the riddles of the world ;—and when he said that life was full of riddles, who could give him the lie ?

Against his passionate accusations of God, and the indisputable truth of the facts to which he pointed, his friends were powerless. What could be expected of men the sum of whose wisdom was a constant reiteration of the ancient doctrine ? They were completely silenced. The last who spoke uttered a few incoherent words about God's fearful power and the sinful state of man, but soon broke off. Job had the last word, and when he had silenced contradiction he poured out his heart once more. He mocked the feebleness of his orthodox friends. What wonderful assistance had they given him ! Of whom had they been speaking ? Of God ? Aye, God was great indeed ! Before him the very shades trembled, and it was He that created and sustained all things. "Behold," he cried, after a glowing description of God's omnipotence, "this is but a little fragment of His works. We understand but a whisper of Him ; and who shall comprehend the thunder of His might ?"

So now that his friends were driven off the field, Job once more laid bare his own condition, and with it the riddle that tortured him. As for himself he could not solve it, and did not believe that human insight could compass it. God had real wisdom, and knew the how and the why of things ; but as for man, alas ! he could find no answer to the hard questions of life,

and it seemed he must simply content himself with passive submission and fear of Yahweh. But what a riddle it all was ! Once he had been prosperous to the utmost, rich and honoured. Now he was poor, deserted by everyone, the laughing-stock of vagabonds. To what must he attribute the change ? Not to his own evil conduct, for his life had been clean. He would swear that he had hated injustice, had been guiltless of in chastity or adultery, had been innocent of idolatry, had never been inhospitable, and had not so much as turned a lustful eye upon a woman. He did not shrink from calling upon God to answer. If the Almighty would but listen to him he would meet him as proudly as a monarch !

What he had asked was granted to him. Yahweh undertook to answer him, but in no gentle wise ! “ Who is this,” cried the deity from the midst of a thunderstorm, “ Who is this that obscures the rule of God with words of no understanding ? Come now, gird thyself up like a man. I will question and thou shalt instruct me ! Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth ? Tell me that, if thou knowest it !” Then Yahweh made his accuser feel his greatness, and pointed out to him the mystery and glory of nature displayed in the wild ass, the unicorn, the ostrich, steed, and hawk, all of which revealed the majesty of their creator. “ Then how shall the caviller contend with the Almighty ? Let him that accuses God make answer to this !”

Then Yahweh ceased, and Job was humbled by the thought of the greatness of the Lord, and answered : “ Behold I am too feeble. What shall I reply ? I lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will do it no more, yea twice, but henceforth I am silent !” Then Yahweh, not yet satisfied with his submission, went on to speak of his creatures, the crocodile and the hippopotamus, as well suited to bring man into a humble attitude towards God. Upon this Job repeated his confession :—

I know that thou canst do all things,
 That nought is impossible to thee.
 "Who is this that darkens God's rule by words with-
 out understanding?"
 I spoke without having fathomed,
 Of things too wonderful, things that I knew not.
 "Listen and I will speak,
 I will question and thou shalt teach!"
 I had heard of thee with the ear,
 But now has mine eye beheld thee;
 Therefore I recant my words,
 And do penance in dust and ashes.

Such is the last word of this writer's wisdom, with all his gifts and all his depth of feeling: God is great and we understand Him not.

Man, incapable of comprehending the world! This was likewise the conclusion of Agur, the only "sage" except Solomon whose name we know.¹ "Thus says the man: I have wearied myself about God, I have wearied myself until I can think no more;² for I suppose I am not so wise as others and have no common sense, have learned no wisdom and have no knowledge of the Holy One. Who can go up to heaven and come down again? Who can gather the wind in his fists and collect the waters in a garment? Who firmly establishes the earth? What is his name? and what his son's name? can'st thou tell?"³

From Agur's other sayings we may see the dispiriting effect which this recognition of powerlessness exercised upon the sage's reflections, for they consist of very commonplace observations and simple admonitions. Why should anyone trouble himself with profound speculations and the eager

¹ Proverbs xxx.—xxxi. 9.

² After an amended version.

³ Proverbs xxx. 1—4.

pursuit of truth when he had already come to the conclusion that it was completely out of his reach ?

"God is so great that we cannot understand him," is a conviction that does not solve a single problem, and fails to remove the doubt which it succeeds in silencing ; indeed, it virtually admits that the doubter is right, and that his difficulties cannot be removed. The assertion, "God is so great that his ways are unfathomable," may produce a dumb submission to the will of the Irresistible, but can give rise to no free harmony of will, and therefore to no love.

It is not surprising, then, that the Israelite, after fruitless search for a solution of his problems, finally rested in the only answer that he could find, for doubt, however legitimate, is fraught with danger, and often leads to disbelief. The writer of the book of Job, however, not only recognised the justice of hesitating to ascribe righteousness to Yahweh, but even felt that the heart of the honest doubter covers a far warmer love of God than that of the man who refuses to see the contradiction between his own convictions and the facts of life, but simply argues in support of foregone conclusions, and maintains the old belief against all comers. He therefore places Job, the doubter, far above his orthodox friends, for though he has to recant before God, yet he is right as against them.

Such was the judgment of this writer ; and it was sound. But the masses did not accept it. They had not the courage of the author himself ; they had not the love of truth which enabled him to pass the most delicate subjects under fearless review without shrinking from any result. Then, as always, the masses of mankind required leading strings, were strongly conservative, and had a horror of "doubt." It is by no means surprising, therefore, that the book of Job has come down to us in an enlarged and by no means improved version. In a certain sense it is very fortunate that it was here and there revised and interpolated, for in its original form it

probably would not have come down to us at all. The scribes of a later generation, who decided what books were to be regarded as holy and what were not, would most likely have rejected it. The contents of the original work would have shocked them deeply, for it exposes the feebleness of the defenders of the old belief. It was this that offended the man who inserted chapters xxxii.—xxxvii. Just at the point when Job has finally silenced his friends and has once more set forth his difficulties, this interpolator defers the answer of Yahweh by bringing a fourth friend upon the stage. His name is Elihu, and he is highly incensed both with Job for uttering such arrogant words, and with the three friends for allowing themselves to be put to silence. Since he was the youngest he had waited till they had done, but now he could not refrain from speaking. What did they mean by saying that God only could answer Job, and that no man could do it? He would show them what he could do !

After such a flourish of trumpets we might expect something very wonderful, but Elihu's discourse contains hardly anything fresh. He repeats, for the most part, in a very prolix and wearisome form, what the others had said before. The writer evidently intended to show that Job had not at all disarmed the arguments of his friends, and that the force of the old belief remained unbroken.

This interpolator, then, was perfectly aware of the real intention of the original book ; but we cannot say as much for the writer of xxvii. 11—23. He was shocked and perplexed to find so good a man as Job denying God's justice so audaciously. He could not really have meant it ! So he puts a few glaring assertions of the opposite doctrine into his mouth to serve as a corrective !

Still less was the book understood by the writer of the last chapter. He tell us that when Yahweh had spoken to Job, He expressed his displeasure with his three friends

because they had not spoken rightly concerning Him, as Job had. He told them to go to Job with seven oxen and seven rams and entreat him to pray for them, while they offered their sacrifice, for it would only be at Job's request that he would refrain from punishing their folly. So the three friends, continues the writer, obeyed the command, and Yahweh accepted Job's intercession. Then he made an end of Job's misery, and gave him twice as much as he had had before, upon which all his relatives and friends came to visit him and to comfort him by word and deed for the sufferings Yahweh had inflicted upon him. So Job's latter years were still more blessed than the former, his possessions were great beyond measure, he had seven sons and three daughters again, and there were no girls in all the land more beautiful than his. He still lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his descendants to the fourth generation. At last he died, satisfied with life.

The main conceptions of this epilogue are in direct contradiction with those of the book itself. Here we are told that Job had said what was right about God; whereas, in the book itself he is constantly reviling God's ways, and has to recant at last. Here he is rewarded for his virtue and restored to his former honour, and the ancient doctrine of the prosperity of the good is still maintained; whereas, according to the original writer, the suffering of the pious is an insoluble enigma, in presence of which we can only say, "God is great, and we comprehend him not!"

Misunderstood and mutilated, the book of Job went down to posterity. The representations of the prologue and epilogue prevailed over those of the poem itself. The book was held in honour as a description of the patient endurance of suffering, instead of the expression of a deep-seated doubt as to the truth of the most fundamental dogma of Israelitish piety, and Job has become, to Jew and Christian, the very type of patience!¹

¹ James v. 11.

The conclusion to which the original writer was brought by his reflections was unsatisfying to the last degree. Though life is full of riddles, he thought, though the truth seems to be in conflict with God's justice, yet man must simply bow his head and submit to God's irresistible might. This was the death-blow to the pursuit of "wisdom." If it was impossible to gain any insight into the truth, if the principle upon which happiness and unhappiness were apportioned to men was inaccessible to human knowledge, why should anyone weary himself with searching for God? In after times "wise men" did indeed arise, but their school had no future before it, for no further development was conceivable.

Meanwhile the old established doctrine held its own amongst the people. We shall meet with it at every turn. It was constantly laid down as if nothing could be urged against it. An instance may be found in Psalm xxxvii., which is one of the so-called *alphabetical* psalms, that is to say, its first verse begins with the first letter of the alphabet, its second with the second, and so on. This artificial style of composition probably dates from after the Captivity. In this psalm, as in so many others, the ancient doctrine is laid down with the utmost confidence.

About the ungodly fret thyself not,
And be not envious of ill-doers.
As the grass is cut down, so they fall ;
As the green herb, so they wither.
But trust in Yahweh, and do right ;
Bide in the land, and feed thee with justice ;
Blessed be thy soul in Yahweh !
By Him shall thy heart's desires be given.

Nor had even the poet of Psalm lxxiii.¹ consciously outgrown the same conviction, for he begins by declaring that

¹ See Vol. II., p. 378.

Yahweh is good to Israel, to the pure of heart, and confessing that his faith was not a little shocked when he observed the prosperity of the wicked. Truly their lot was enviable, and it seemed to be in vain that the pious man had purified his heart and washed his hands in innocence. But no! when we consider the end of the godless, we see that it is destruction. Alas! how foolish he had been when he envied them. There was no blessedness like that of being near to God.

So this poet and many another pious son of Israel found the highest blessedness, the real reward of virtue, in that communion with God, that inner life of the heart, which is fostered by true piety; and if the authors of Job and other pious and thoughtful men could but have clearly seen that the true solution of the great enigma that tortured them lay there, then they would no longer have been driven to that answer of dull submission, "God is great, and we comprehend him not." In ceasing to look for any immediate connection between virtue and prosperity on the one hand and wickedness and adversity upon the other, they would have found God's blessing, not exclusively indeed, but chiefly, in that wealth of the spirit, that joy in life and strength for death which is the lot of His obedient children. And then they would have been at peace even amongst life's many mysteries.

But no Israelite ever consciously attained to this conception. They could not shake themselves free from the material ideas of the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice which they had learned from their fathers, and as a matter of avowed belief they continued to the end to trace the avenging hand of God in adversity, and the evidence of his favour in prosperity.

CHAPTER XV.

EZRA THE SCRIBE.

EZRA VII.—X.

EIGHTY years had elapsed since Zerubbabel's return. The glowing promises of the prophets had come to nought. Jerusalem's wall lay in ruins once more. Persian armies on their way to Egypt, or returning after a defeat, were quartered almost every year in Palestine, and increased the burdens of the inhabitants more than ever. The spirit of the Jews was exhausted, and their obedience to the commands of Yahweh grew ever feebler. They were gradually uniting with the surrounding peoples. Many of them, even including members of the high priestly family, had contracted marriages with foreigners. What would become of Israel? Would it melt away amongst the nations and lose its own peculiar character? Such a result appeared more imminent than ever. But the danger was averted just in time by the rise of a great man, who returned from Babylonia at the head of a band of several thousand exiles, and brought fresh blood into the Jewish state. It was Ezra the priest.

We should therefore be entirely mistaken were we to suppose, as we might well have been tempted to do, that all the sturdy believers had quitted Babylonia with Zerubbabel, and only left the faint-hearted and indifferent behind. This was by no means the case. There were zealous worshippers of Yahweh who cherished a heartfelt interest in their country and their people, and yet had hesitated to leave the place of their exile and join in rebuilding the holy city and the temple. We have no direct accounts of what went on in their hearts, and must therefore be satisfied with conjectures; but we may easily suppose what it was that kept them back. It was by no means clear, they thought, that Yahweh desired them to return. Was Israel sufficiently chastised as yet? The

burning words of many a prophet proclaimed that it was, and the Second Isaiah even declared that the punishment exceeded the offence;¹ but there was ample room for another opinion on the subject. Israel was still far from being a holy people, consecrated to Yahweh, and had by no means obeyed his law so faithfully as to be certain of his favour. And as to the authority of the prophets, we know enough of the opposition they so often had to contend against to feel no surprise at their failing to command the assent of all the Jews in the land of captivity. We can quite understand that many of the exiles gave small credit to their words. Had not Jerusalem fallen in spite of the repeated and emphatic promises of almost all the prophets? The exiles probably never gave themselves a clear account of what they really thought about these men of God, and even continued to regard them as the messengers of Yahweh, but for all that they did not surrender their judgment to them. Then when they heard of the sad condition in which their brethren found themselves on their return, they were of course confirmed in their opinion that it had not yet been Yahweh's hour.—Many a zealous Jew from Palestine must have been deeply pained when he came into contact with his Babylonian brothers, by their question, "Is it not just as we always told you?"

Now we shall see from the sequel of the history, and more especially from the character of Ezra's work, that the priestly spirit gained a complete ascendancy amongst the Babylonian Israelites. At first sight this may seem a little strange, for, since they had no access to the temple, the legislation of Deuteronomy precluded them from offering any sacrifices to Yahweh. But the phenomenon is quite explicable. In the first place, ever since Josiah's reformation Israel had obviously been moving in the direction of the systematic piety of the Law, that is to say the excessive estima-

¹ Isaiah x^l. 2.

tion of outward forms and ceremonies ;¹ and such a movement is not easily diverted by external influences. The temple, it is true, the exiles could not have, but the Law did not stand or fall with the temple, and Yahweh had given other commands besides those that related to sacrifice. Could they not still observe the sabbath, abstain from everything unclean, and scrupulously conduct themselves as Yahweh's consecrated people, even in the foreign land ?

The form under which the Mosaic principles triumphed amongst the exiles was of a strongly priestly character, as we have seen already from the works of their historians,² and above all from Ezekiel;³ and when the prophets and their supporters had gone with Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, the chief counterpoise to the priestly spirit was removed from among the exiles, and the priests had all the freer play.

The spirit in which the Jewish priests in Babylonia laboured may be gathered from the precepts which they gave their people, and which are still preserved in the Pentateuch. We owe to them a work to which we have often alluded already,⁴ but which we must now examine more expressly. I mean the Book of Origins. We need not revert to the narratives which the author borrowed from tradition and presented in a shortened and generally greatly modified form ; but we must turn our attention to the method of the work, for it seems to have formed a single whole, the several parts of which were well held together by the leading thought. The author's purpose was to present a sketch of Israel's past, especially of the time of Moses and Joshua, which he looked upon as the golden age of Israel, with a view to furnishing a

¹ Compare Vol. III., pp. 443 ff. ² See pp. 85 ff. ³ See pp. 102 ff.

⁴ Vol. I., pp. 308 ff. Compare pp. 82 f., 100, 138 f., 194 f., 208, 237, 254, 294, 297 ; Vol. II., pp. 21 f., 45, 57, 82, 90, 102, 129, 145 f.

model for his own day. All that preceded Moses had simply served as a preparation for his work, and a distinct development leading gradually up to it might be traced in the divine revelations. From the very creation of the world the sabbath had been hallowed, the prohibition of food with blood in it dated from the time of Noah, Abraham received from El-shaddai the ordinance of circumcision, though as yet no sacrifices were instituted. To Moses the deity revealed himself under his name of Yahweh, and the Pascal sacrifice was ere long ordained; but it was at Sinai that Israel's worship was first regulated in accordance with Yahweh's precepts, and it is here that the priestly historian describes the people, with the tribe of Levi at its head, subdivided and encamped according to the will of its god. To his will also Israel conformed unconditionally at the conquest of Canaan, for every tribe had its dwelling-place assigned to it by lot. The high priest Eleazar stood by Joshua's side at the head of the people, and as long as these pious leaders lived the religion of Moses was strictly conformed to.

Let us now examine some of the details of this ideal!

The sanctuary and its servants occupy a very prominent place in this work,¹ as they do in that of the prophet Ezekiel, but inasmuch as our author places his ideal in the time of Moses, when Israel was wandering in the desert, he could not speak of a temple, and had to content himself with describing a portable sanctuary. But the model from which he drew his picture was the edifice of Solomon. The ancient legends supplied him with the name of "tent of conference,"² under which he described a sanctuary of considerable dimensions and great splendour divided into three compartments. First there was the holy of holies where the ark was set, on the lid of which our author placed the cherubs, which really

¹ Exodus xxv.—xxx. 11, xxxv. 4.—xl.

² Compare Vol. II., pp. 72 ff.

stood on the two sides of it in the temple of Solomon, and covered it with their wings. This holy of holies, into which no ordinary priest, much less a layman, might either go or look, was only to be entered once a year by the high priest. It was not separated from the holy place by doors, as in Solomon's temple, but by a curtain. In the holy place stood the altar of incense, overlaid with gold, and near it a gilt table, with the loaves of so-called shew bread, which must ever lie before Yahweh's countenance. There was also a lamp-stand of pure gold, with seven arms supporting seven lamps, together with the snuffers and other apparatus. The whole edifice could be taken to pieces and carried about, and the author gives elaborate directions as to the way in which this must be done, and who must do it.¹ The uprights were all of a certain length, and the sockets were made of silver; the curtains were made of a great variety of materials, and are carefully described, down to the very hooks and eyes. Round the edifice itself a space was marked off by pillars, between which tapestries were suspended, and in this court the altar of burnt offerings stood, five cubits long, five broad, and three high. It had four horns, and was made of earth, held together by planks covered with brass, and was surrounded with a grating of the same metal.

This "tabernacle" is a pure fiction; and in laying down regulations about its servants, the writer gives free scope to his imagination, surrounding Moses with a regular priesthood, divided into classes, arranged and clothed just as he, the writer, would himself have thought desirable. We have seen that even Ezekiel² departed from the precepts of Deuteronomy by assigning the priesthood exclusively to the sons of Zadok, and only allowing inferior places to the other Levites; but the author of the Book of Origins goes still further. According to him Aaron stood at the head of the

¹ Numbers iv. 1—33.

² See pp. 102, 103.

whole priesthood in the time of Moses, and was followed in his sacred office by his eldest son Eleazar, in whose family the high-priestly office remained hereditary. Yahweh himself had filled skilful men with the spirit of wisdom that they might be able to make suitable robes for Aaron. In the first place there was a many-coloured cape or *ephod*, fastened with thongs, magnificently wrought, upon which there shone two precious stones with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel graven upon them, that Aaron might always bear them before the face of Yahweh as a remembrance to him. Upon the *ephod*, the breastplate of the judgment was hung by golden chains. It was intended to hold the apparatus for consulting the oracle, the *urim* and *thummim*, and it glowed with twelve precious stones, upon which were the names of the twelve tribes. Over the *ephod* was a sky-blue mantle, fringed with pomegranates of every colour, and little golden bells that tinkled whenever the wearer went into Yahweh's presence. A fine linen garment caught by a many-coloured girdle hung down to the feet, and in front of the turban a golden plate was fixed with the inscription "Holy to Yahweh."

Our author describes at length the ceremonies by which the high priest and the priests were consecrated;¹ but he does not lose sight of the other Levites. They had no claim to the priesthood, for it belonged to the sons of Aaron by exclusive birthright, but still they were consecrated to Yahweh. All firstborn sons had belonged to Yahweh from the earliest times, but the Levites were substituted for them, and were therefore specially attached to Yahweh's service, to which they were consecrated by sprinkling, by cutting off the hair, and by sacrifice.² The writer, in giving us the numerical strength of all the tribes, calculates that there were twenty-two thousand Levites, and that this fell short by

¹ Leviticus viii., ix.

² Numbers iii., viii. 5 ff.

two hundred and seventy-three of the number of firstborn Israelites. Five shekels a head had to be paid as redemption money for this surplus.

A man who ranked the servants of the sanctuary with such care, sharply separating the high priests, priests, and Levites, would not be likely to leave their revenues to the goodwill of those who required their services, but would feel impelled to lay down fixed regulations on the subject. The writer of Deuteronomy had made such moderate claims in this direction that he constantly had to commend the Levites to charity in common with widows, orphans, and strangers,¹ though he maintained that all of them were entitled to exercise the priestly functions; but our author fixes his claim upon the believers far higher. Since Levi had no heritage in Israel, the whole tribe must be supported by the altar. Accordingly the Aaronites might claim a great portion of the sacrifices in the shape of meat, oil, wine, corn, all the firstlings and first-fruits, and everything that had been smitten by the ban, now no longer consecrated to Yahweh by destruction.² But the most important regulation of all was that the Levites were to receive a tithe of all the revenues of the Israelites, and in their turn were to give a tithe of their tithe to the Aaronites.³ Moreover special cities were assigned them as residences, eight and forty in all, thirteen of which were to be given to the sons of Aaron. Some of these cities were also to be cities of refuge, in which a man who had accidentally killed another might live in safety from the blood redeemer till the death of the high priest gave him the right of returning to his former dwelling-place.⁴

According to our author all these regulations were put

¹ Deuteronomy xii. 12, 18, 19, and elsewhere.

² Compare Vol. II., pp. 132 f. ³ Numbers xviii.; Leviticus xxvii. 30—33.

⁴ Numbers xxxv. Compare Vol. I., pp. 105 f.

into force by Moses as far as they were practicable in the wilderness, and in all their fulness by Joshua, or rather by Eleazar and Joshua and the representatives of the people, when they reached Canaan.

In addition to these regulations about the sanctuary and its servants, the Book of Origins also contained a great number of laws as to sacrifices and other usages of worship, and indeed the many chapters of Leviticus and Numbers which refer to these subjects most of them issued from the same circle as the Book of Origins, but they are evidently from various hands, and are here and there in contradiction with each other, while the circumstances of the case make it exceedingly difficult to determine accurately what belongs to the Book of Origins itself and what does not. This question however is of minor consequence, for in any case we know the spirit which prevailed amongst the Jews in Babylonia. It was that priestly spirit which we have seen developing in Judah even before the time of Josiah, rising to supremacy after his reformation, and finding an unmistakable reflexion in the ideals of Ezekiel. It had always been the aspiration of the devout to make Israel the consecrated people of Yahweh, the holy god, and now the leading minds in Babylonia emphatically taught that the holiness which became the people of Yahweh revealed itself in outward forms, and must be gained by outward means. Into the inmost partition of the tent of revelation the high priest alone might enter, and he but once in the year, while the "Holy" might only be trodden by the priests, and the very court itself was accessible to none but members of the chosen people. All this was significant of the immeasurable distance that parted Yahweh, the unapproachably holy, from his worshippers, while it reminded the latter of the necessity of the mediation of the priests, who could draw near to Yahweh, could distinguish between clean and unclean, knew how to make the

sacrifices in the way that was acceptable to Yahweh, and could regulate the festivals by which he was glorified.

In describing the spirit of the Book of Origins, we have described the spirit which penetrated Ezra the scribe, who came to raise Judah out of its humiliation and rescue it from the whirlpool of heathendom.

Darius I. (Hystaspes), under whose reign the Jews had rebuilt the temple, had been succeeded by Xerxes I., and he, in the year 465 B.C., by Artaxerxes I. (Long-hand). It was in his reign that Ezra desired the royal permission to set out with several thousands of his countrymen for Judæa.

We know but little of Ezra's descent or circumstances. He is called the son, or descendant, of Seraiah, apparently the chief priest whom Nebuchadrezzar put to death at Riblah after the fall of Jerusalem,¹ but the fact that his genealogy is carried up to Aaron throws a good deal of suspicion upon it altogether. His extraction, however, is of little consequence; and we know, at any rate, that he was "a skilful writer of the law of Moses, which was given by Yahweh, the god of Israel," one "who had set his heart not only upon searching out and studying Yahweh's law, but also upon teaching Israel the course of duty and obligation." It is clear, moreover, that he was held in high regard by his countrymen, amongst whom he had certainly been working for a considerable time, and that he enjoyed the confidence of the king, which was conspicuously manifested when he requested permission to go to Judæa, accompanied by as many of his fellow believers as chose to join him. The prince, who had doubtless political reasons for being glad to gratify the Jews, gave the desired permission. The decree which he issued on this occasion has only come down to us in a mutilated condition, worked over in a Jewish spirit; but

¹ 2 Kings xxv. 18 ff.

since the king desired to attach the Jews to himself and his house, he doubtless showed his favour, as the edict sets forth, by allowing them certain privileges, such as immunity from some of the taxes, apparatus or adornments for their temple, and rich presents. On the other hand, we cannot believe that he threatened all who refused to submit to Ezra's religious ordinances with heavy punishments extending to death and the extinction of the offender's family. On the contrary, Ezra was clothed with no official power. He was not made governor, as Zerubbabel had been. His power was only moral.

Now, as soon as Ezra had obtained the king's permission, he summoned his fellow believers to leave the land of the strangers, and accompany him to Jerusalem, to help to restore the people of Yahweh. The rendezvous was the river Ahava, but we do not know where it was, or even whether the name is correctly spelt. Many thousands collected at the spot, including two priestly clans and one family of Davidic extraction, in all one thousand nine hundred and ninety-six heads of families. Ezra had, therefore, good reason to be pleased with his initial success; but when he reviewed his company upon the third day, he observed with pain that not a single Levite had enrolled himself in its ranks.¹ There were great numbers of Levites in Babylonia, and Ezra could not bear to leave them all behind, so he sent some of the nobles and teachers to a certain Iddo, who dwelt at Casiphia, the site of which is entirely unknown, in the hope that this man's influence might enable them to induce some of the Levites to join the expedition. The deputation not only succeeded in persuading some of the Levites to come, but secured the help of two hundred and twenty temple slaves.

A solemn fast was now prescribed in order to secure the

¹ Compare p. 134.

favour of Yahweh. A long and difficult journey was before the travellers, fraught with danger to themselves, their children, and their possessions, especially as Ezra had been ashamed to ask the king for an escort of cavalry such as had accompanied Zerubbabel's caravan. The fact was, he had said so much about depending entirely upon the mighty help of his god, that he felt his deeds would give his words the lie if he appealed to human protection. Yahweh alone must be Israel's refuge, and he must therefore be invoked with universal supplication. Then Ezra entrusted twelve priests and as many Levites with the rich presents for the temple which he had received from the king, from his courtiers, and from the Jews who stayed behind; after which the caravan set out. The journey occupied about five months, but everything went on so prosperously that Ezra was able to appeal to the result as a proof that the prayer they had offered had earned the favour of Yahweh.

When they reached Jerusalem the travellers rested from the fatigues of the journey three days, and were then solemnly welcomed by the heads of the people. The officiating priests received the consecrated treasure from the holy men in whose keeping it had been lodged during the journey. Numerous sacrifices of oxen and rams were made by the travellers in gratitude to Yahweh for the favour he had shown them. Twelve bullocks, after the number of the tribes, and eight times twelve rams were offered as a burnt sacrifice, and the sacred number of eleven times seven lambs and twelve goats burned as a sin offering. No joyous feast concluded the ceremony. They desired to thank Yahweh for his visible protection, yet it was not so much their gratitude as their sense of guilt that they wished to express. They humbled themselves before the mighty and holy God.

If the travellers had reason to be thankful themselves for the prosperous conclusion of their journey, their arrival

was also a signal of joy to others. The priests rejoiced at the arrival of a band of zealous worshippers of Yahweh. The treasure they brought was a welcome acquisition, and a period of renewed splendour seemed about to dawn upon the temple now that so many thousands of fresh worshippers would come to it with their gifts. The zealots for the law of Yahweh had every reason to rejoice in the prospect of the assistance which Ezra the skilful scribe would be sure to give them in their work. And the whole people had cause to praise the goodness of Yahweh; for the letters which Ezra brought with him produced such manifest goodwill on the part of the governors of Judæa and all the surrounding countries, that they supported the Jews in the exercise of their worship and in all things else.

And yet it was not every Jew that rejoiced. There were some who felt small confidence in this troop of zealots—led by a scribe and priest—and anticipated no good to themselves or others from their new fellow-citizens. This was specially the case with such as had married foreign wives; and under this category came several nobles and even priests. Was Ezra aware of this? We should hardly have thought it possible for him to be ignorant of it; but our account of the affair in the book of Ezra is from his own hand, and he speaks of it as something of which he heard for the first time, and with a frightful shock, at Jerusalem.

A few days after his arrival he was in the court of the temple when certain nobles approached him to tell him of this abomination. Israel, they said, had not kept free from commingling with the heathens, and even some of the priests and Levites had married or allowed their sons to marry foreign wives, Canaanites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Edomites.¹ As soon as Ezra heard this

¹ After an amended version.

terrible announcement, he rent his clothes, tore the hair from his head and beard, and sat down dumb with horror, the very picture of despair. Hour after hour passed. A crowd of temple-goers gradually collected round him. From mouth to mouth ran the whisper that explained why the priest so newly arrived was thus overwhelmed with grief. It was Israel's pollution!—Then sympathy with Ezra's pain might be read on many a countenance, while here and there a fist was clenched and the sombre fire of fanaticism began to glow in many an eye. Those impious wretches had indeed polluted Israel, and thence came all this misery! Well might the pious priest sit there dismayed. It was indeed a horror, and ought never to have been endured so long!—The time of evening sacrifice drew near, and the priests were bringing the lamb to the altar. In another moment this daily gift to Yahweh would be offered. Then Ezra rose, as from a swoon, but only to fall down before Yahweh anew with outstretched hands. Listen! he is praying: "O my God! for shame and confusion I cannot lift up my face to thee, my God! For our sins are heaped up above our heads, and our guilt as high as heaven. From our fathers' days until now we have greatly trespassed. Because of our sins we have been delivered, with our kings and priests, into the power of the princes of the heathen, slain and banished, plundered, and put to shame even to this day. And now, O Yahweh, thou hast once more given us a breathing space, hast once more made us to dwell in the holy land; and though we are slaves of the Persian kings, thou hast made them gracious to us, to suffer us to rebuild our temple and our city. What shall we say then? O our God, we have cast to the winds thy commandments which thy prophets have brought us. They told us that the land into which we came was an unclean land, polluted by the abominations of those that dwelt in it, and that we must not mingle with them. But we, in spite of all

that has befallen us and all the mercy thou has shown, have intermarried with the peoples that commit abominations. Ah, be not so wrath with us as to consume us utterly! O Yahweh, god of Israel, we lie down before thee in our guilt, for who could defend himself before thee?"

While Ezra was thus praying, the crowd was still collecting round him. Men, women, and even children pressed together with loud cries of woe. The fervour Ezra had aroused found utterance in mingled imprecations and confessions of guilt, with exhortations to instant action. No sooner had he ceased than a certain Shechaniah said to him, in the name of the rest, "It is but too true; we have sinned against our god. But there is hope for Israel yet. Let us make a solemn vow to Yahweh to send away our foreign wives together with their children, according to the Lord's decree and the will of all who fear the commands of God. Let us do what the Law prescribes! Come now! it lies with you to do this thing, and we will help you. Take heart, and set your hand to the work!" Loud cries of approval rose from every side, but many a heart sank as the scribe's dark glance of deep resolve proclaimed that his stern nature would shrink from nothing in the execution of his god's command. "Do you swear," he cried, "to obey the precepts of Yahweh?" "We swear!" they answered, "as Yahweh lives! May God requite us if we hold not to our word!" It was enough. Ezra withdrew into the chamber of a certain Johanan, and as he went inexorable resolve and unutterable pain might be read upon his features. The people dispersed, triumphant or cast down, full of hope or sick at heart, according to the light in which they regarded Ezra's resolve. In truth, it was no small matter to dismiss all the foreign women and their children. In a moment of excitement the hasty resolve was taken; but how many tears must pay the price of its fulfilment! How tender the ties that it

must break ! How many women and children must it doom to starvation ! And how many powerful neighbours must it render hostile, how many influential Jews offend !

But while motives, some of which were more and some less exalted, shook the resolution of many, Ezra himself remained firm. He was profoundly grieved and shocked ; he spent the whole night without meat or drink in Johanan's chamber,¹ and every Jew might soon perceive that he had taken up the matter in earnest. Messengers were despatched throughout the land to summon all the citizens, in the name of the chiefs and elders, to an assembly on the third day. Woe to him who should absent himself ! His possessions would be smitten by the ban, which meant in those days confiscation in favour of the priests, and he himself would be thrust out of the community of Yahweh.

The decree must have referred especially to the heads of families, and though even thus it cannot have been literally complied with, yet on the appointed day, the twentieth of the ninth month, which would fall in our December, a numerous assembly met in the court before the temple. The tone of the meeting was anything but tranquil. Everyone knew what a serious and far-reaching reformation was to be proposed and carried through. Would any resistance be offered ? If so, by whom, and with what result ? Would the powerful offenders acquiesce in the sentence ? The rain was falling in torrents, and made the body unfit to bear the strain of mental tension ; but Ezra, without thinking of that, set before the Jews the magnitude of the sin they had committed, and exhorted them, for the honour of Yahweh, to part from their foreign wives. Hardly had he ceased before his hearers signified their assent. Only a few, whom Ezra mentions by name in his memorials, ventured to resist. Their attempt was vain. The speaker's strong personality prevailed, and it

¹ After an amended version.

was resolved by an overwhelming majority to purify Israel from the heathen stain. The utmost that could be done was to persuade the fanatical reformer that it was impossible to carry through the new measures on the very spot! The number of the cases was too great to admit of immediate investigation, and the rain made it simply impossible to remain in the open air. The proper course was to appoint a suitable commission to preside over the progress and completion of the measure.

So the assembly dispersed, and a few days afterwards the spiritual tribunal held its first sitting. Whoever had married a foreign wife was summoned before it, and there were so many cases that the hands of the judges were full for two months. Ezra presided over the court, and we may be sure that his presence prevented any concessions from being made upon any pretext. Everyone had to submit. The priests who had married foreign wives must promise to dismiss both them and their children, and must also sacrifice a ram as a sin offering. The names of all the offenders were taken down, and those of a hundred and thirteen householders are preserved in our book of Ezra.

As far as depended on Ezra and his zealous adherents the law was now enforced. Cost what it might, Israel should be a holy people, cleansed from outlandish pollution; and though many of the culprits broke their word, and when they were no longer under the eye of the spiritual judges shrank from executing their promises, yet many did actually dismiss their wives and in some cases their children with them.

We stand aghast at such fanaticism, and well we may! It is but the worship of Molech in another form. Ezra's Yahweh is not our God.

CHAPTER XVI.

N E H E M I A H.

NEHEMIAH I.—VII., XI., XII.

OUR book of Ezra suddenly breaks off, as we have seen, after stating that the Jews dismissed their foreign wives, and it is thirteen years before we hear of Ezra again. Then we meet him side by side with Nehemiah, in the book which bears the name of the latter. What took place in the interim? Did the zealous scribe sit down with his hands before him? It was not in his nature. Then why did he not carry his great measure through, and complete his other reforms? Why did he actually look on while some of the Jews retained their foreign wives? The Israelitish historians give no direct answer to these questions, but we are not left altogether in the dark.

In the first place we must bear in mind that the measure which Ezra forced upon the Jews could not fail to meet with violent opposition. This opposition would come in the first instance from those who were called upon to break the tenderest domestic ties, but it would not be confined to them. Would not the relatives of the women, who had been dismissed together with their children, take up the cause? Was not the whole measure a gross insult to every member of the surrounding tribes? Who could look with calmness upon such intolerable national arrogance? If none but people of humble position had been affected by the Jewish exclusiveness, the consequences would not have been so serious; but amongst the Jews who had allied themselves with foreigners there were many men of distinguished position who had doubtless been actuated by political motives; and their connections amongst the other peoples were men of corresponding rank and influence. Three of them are known to us by name: Geshem the Arab, of whom we know nothing more;

Sanballat of Beth-horon, in the district of Samaria; and Tobiah, a royal functionary in the land of the Ammonites. The two last of these were allied with priestly families of Israel, and Tobiah was himself of Israelitish extraction, as we may see from his name, which ends in *yah*, and his son's name (Johanan),¹ which begins with *yo*, both of which are abbreviations of Yahweh. What wonder that these men and others who smarted under the same insult endeavoured to make the Jews pay dear for their arrogance? Prompted by them, the governors of the surrounding districts persuaded Artaxerxes to forbid the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, which were again in ruins.² We may therefore well suppose that self-interest, if nothing else, would range many of the Jews against Ezra. Even if they had promised in a moment of excitement faithfully to support him, yet when they had cooled down they shrank from facing the enormous difficulties of the measure. Moreover, we shall presently see that some of Ezra's opponents were actuated by nobler motives.

Towards the end of the thirteen years during which we lose sight of Ezra, the condition of the Jews was melancholy in the extreme. Numerous Persian armies, on their way to or from Egypt, kept passing through Palestine; and nine or ten years after Ezra's arrival, Megabyzus, the governor of Syria, revolted against the king. We do not know which side the Jews, whose country was part of his territory, took in the struggle, but in no case can they have escaped the sufferings of war. It has been conjectured that the walls of Jerusalem were again thrown down on this occasion; and, in any case, circumstances were not favourable to carrying out a great reformation to which there was so strong an opposition.

We must further bear in mind that the harmony between Ezra and the stricter party in Jerusalem, which joined him

¹ Nehemiah vi. 18.

² Ezra iv.

in his crusade against heathen alliances, cannot have been complete. The Babylonian Jews and those who had now been settled in Palestine for eighty years had had their separate histories, and their sympathy on many points must have been very imperfect. Throughout these thirteen years Ezra must often have felt that he was bound hand and foot.

He was now to find a doughty ally in Nehemiah.

Not all the pious worshippers of Yahweh had quitted Babylonia with Zerubbabel, and even Ezra had left behind him many hearts that beat warmly for the temple and the people of Yahweh. In various sections of the great Persian kingdom thousands were still left who did not renounce their Jewish extraction, and were deeply attached to the service of Israel's god. Amongst them was Nehemiah. This man, who is known to us from his own memorials, worked up with later materials in the book that bears his name, occupied the distinguished post of cupbearer to the king. It was in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (445 B.C.), when the court was in the winter residence at Susa, that Nehemiah received a visit from his brother Hanani and several other Jews, who gave him a most mournful account of the condition of the holy land, in answer to his inquiries. The Jews were again in deep humiliation; disaster upon disaster had swept over the land; the walls of Jerusalem were overturned and her gates burnt. This account affected Nehemiah profoundly. Alas for his poor fatherland! He spent the next few days in fasting and prayer. As a member of Yahweh's people now suffering for their sins—the only possible explanation of this chastisement—Nehemiah humbled himself before the God of heaven, confessed his trespasses, and begged for pity. He reminded his god that, though he had threatened Israel with dispersion for violating the law of Moses, he had also promised that he would collect the exiles once again if they

repented. And, as he fasted and prayed¹ in solitude, the resolution grew within him to ask the king's permission to visit and to help his brethren. He would lay down the honourable post he held and beg for the office—unenviable enough in those days—of deputy governor of Palestine. But would Artaxerxes give him the post? Would he not take offence at his request? It was not without trepidation that even a high official ventured to make a request of the king; for wealth, honour, and life itself depended on his favour. At the royal court no one ventured even to look sad or mourn.¹ Who could be sad, asked the courtly flatterers, when basking in the light of the king, the sun of the world? And the distrust which revealed itself in every detail of an Oriental court made the least appearance of depression hateful. As long as everyone was merry no conspiracy need be feared, but a sad heart might well hatch mischief. It was therefore a bold step to make a request of the king. "O Yahweh," prayed Nehemiah, "hearken to my supplication and to that of all thy servants, and grant that the king may give me what I ask." Strengthened by prayer, he resolved to make the venture.

It was in the month of Nisan (end of March and beginning of April), which was the first in the Jewish year, when Nehemiah once more found himself at his post at the royal feast. There sat the king at the head of the table where hundreds of guests were daily feasted. Next to him, but on a lower bench, was the most favoured of his wives, whom for the time at least he had made his queen. To the right and left sat his other distinguished consorts, his ministers, counselors, courtiers, generals, and guests, all their faces dressed in smiles, for they rejoiced in the presence of majesty! Opposite the king, at the free end of the table, stood the host of inferior wives, whose business it was to grace the feast

¹ Compare Esther iv. 2.

with music and song. Behind the monarch stood the magnificent charger in which the wine was mixed with water, and out of which the cupbearer laded it in a little can fixed to a long handle, and then poured it in a glancing stream, without spilling a drop, into the golden cup which he presented on his knee to the king,—having first tasted it himself, however, as a pledge that the sparkling draught was not poisoned.

Nehemiah was in his place as cupbearer, and though his heart was troubled he assumed an expression of joy¹ suited to the royal presence. But the king, whose eye nothing escaped, perceived his agitation, and half in kindness to his trusted servant, half in anger that anyone should be otherwise than joyous in his presence, he exclaimed, "Why are you sad? You are not ill. What have you on your mind?" The cupbearer, whose inmost heart was thus revealed, fell trembling to the ground before the king, and, covering his mouth that his breath might not desecrate the person of the monarch, he reverently replied, "May the king live for ever! Alas, my lord, how can I help being sad when the city where my forefathers lie buried is laid waste, and its gates burnt down?" The prince was evidently in a good temper, and was not indisposed to do something for his servant's fatherland. "What would you have me do?" he asked. This was encouraging enough, but Nehemiah's intended request to be allowed to go to Judæa himself as governor was no trifle! Would it be granted? A silent prayer rose from his heart to the God of heaven. Then he uttered his request in trepidation, but soon read in the gracious expression of the king and queen that his God had given them kindly hearts towards him; and this was placed beyond a doubt when the king asked him how long he wished his leave of absence to be, and on his mentioning the period gave him the permission he desired.

¹ After an amended version of Nehemiah ii. 1:

The needful preparations were soon made. Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judæa, and received a passport from the king to secure him against being delayed in any of the districts through which he had to go. He also carried a letter to the ruler of some district, evidently not far from Jerusalem, commanding him to furnish wood for the beams of the temple fortress, the city walls, and Nehemiah's residence. Jerusalem must indeed have been in a pitiful condition if this was the only way to secure the timber needed. When he had provided himself with all he required, Nehemiah set out for his fatherland, accompanied by several officers and a division of cavalry.

What will our new governor bring us? The Jews, especially Ezra and his friends, must have asked this question anxiously enough. Alas, they had not generally much good to expect from the king's representatives, and they were now in such a miserable plight. Was it possible that this Nehemiah would alleviate their sufferings? At first he said nothing. Like a prudent man he determined to begin by ascertaining how things really stood. He knew very well that certain influential men, such as Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, would have regarded him with most unfriendly eyes, and would have thwarted him by every means in their power had they known that he intended to do his best to refortify Jerusalem. This may seem strange; for, though the men in question were not of pure Israelitish blood, yet inasmuch as they were closely connected with Jewish families, including that of the high priest, and were themselves worshippers of Yahweh, we should not expect them to be jealous of Judah's prosperity. But we must remember that the project of fortifying Jerusalem was closely connected with Messianic expectations, and might therefore really lead to a revolt against the Persian king; for it was

impossible to think of the seed of Jacob in the golden age as dependent on the stranger. Nor must we forget that those who were most eager to rebuild the walls were at the same time fanatical advocates of Israel's purity and the maintenance of the laws that forbade intermarriages with the stranger. Nehemiah was not fair to Sanballat and his party when he said that they could not bear anyone to seek the welfare of the Israelites.¹ They sought their welfare themselves, though not in Nehemiah's way, but by bringing them into close alliance with the surrounding tribes; and this they would never succeed in doing if Jerusalem were fortified and furnished a fulcrum to the exclusive party. Nehemiah had, therefore, reasons enough for caution.

Two days after his arrival he had his beast saddled, and, accompanied by a few trusty servants on foot, rode out by the Valley-gate on the west side of the city, round by the Dragon's Well on to the Dung-gate, surveying with a keen eye the ruined walls and fire-burnt gates.² But when he attempted to ride along the southern wall of the city, to the Fountain-gate and on to the king's pool, right on the north-eastern side of the city, his ass could no longer make its way amongst the heaps of rubbish, and he had to pursue his journey on foot, still carefully observing the state of the walls. Sparing no pains, he returned that night by the same difficult way.

Little did they think in Jerusalem that the new governor was surveying with his own eyes the work which he intended to urge his countrymen to undertake. But they were soon to know it. Nehemiah summoned the heads of the people, and exhorted them to set their hands to the work of restoring Jerusalem's walls and gates, that their shame might be removed. To encourage them in the task, he told them how

¹ Nehemiah ii. 10.

² After an amended version of Nehemiah ii. 13.

obviously God had helped him with the king and on his journey, and reported the gracious words of Artaxerxes. His words were so cogent that everyone felt moved to begin the task with vigour, and the bold resolve was made.

But it was not to be carried through without great opposition. The very first steps were resisted by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, who tried to throw suspicion on the undertaking, and openly accused Nehemiah of intending to rebel against the king. But he was not the man to be scared by opposition, and his bold reply at once revealed the spirit in which he worked and the side he would take in the religious contest: "The God of heaven will prosper us. We, his servants, will rise up and build the walls; but as for you, what part have you in Jerusalem? You shall not be enrolled as citizens of hers, and your descendants shall not dwell in her."

He was a bold man, this Nehemiah, courageous and thorough, but narrow in his conceptions and intolerant of those who differed from him. He and Ezra would find each other out, and there would be perfect harmony between them, for they were kindred spirits.

But for the present there was no possibility of either political or ecclesiastical reforms. The book of Nehemiah tells us, indeed, of certain steps in this direction being taken while the walls were being built; but the order of events is not always strictly observed in this book, and we can hardly believe that there was any time for other business during the two and fifty days occupied in rebuilding the walls, for this work must have completely engrossed the energies of the very men upon whose help Nehemiah could rely. It is true that the wall was not completely ruined, but was only broken down in certain places by the people's enemies, who thought it unadvisable to let the Jews inhabit a fortified city; and in the same way, although the woodwork of the turrets had

collapsed and was charred or burnt with fire, yet the turrets themselves were still there. But though the task of Nehemiah and his friends was only to repair these serious damages, yet that was quite enough to tax their powers heavily. They were not disheartened, however, and set to work manfully. We must not suppose that the task was performed at common cost or by common labour. The plan adopted was for wealthy individuals, or companies, to undertake certain specified tasks, such as restoring a turret, or rebuilding a definite portion of the wall at their own expense; those who lived in Jerusalem taking charge, by preference, of the places nearest to their own houses. The book of Nehemiah enumerates forty-two turrets or sections of wall, together with the names of those who restored them.

Meanwhile, the leaders of the opposite party were laying their heads together. A meeting was held in Sanballat's city, at which many distinguished Samaritans were present, as well as Tobiah from the land of the Ammonites. The question discussed was how to thwart Nehemiah's obvious intention of making Jerusalem a fortress once again. Voices were doubtless raised in favour of armed interference; but Sanballat declared himself against this policy, and raised a laugh by throwing ridicule upon the whole affair, and prophesying that it would soon stop of itself. "What can these feeble Jews accomplish? They will leave it all to their god again,¹ and will fancy they have come together for a sacrificial feast! Why, it is all to be finished in a day or two! Just look, the stones, all charred as they are, have come to life among the ruins, and are going into their places all of themselves!" Tobiah was not behind him. "Let them build away!" he cried. "The first fox that happens to jump over their wall will throw it all down again!"

When he recorded all this mockery Nehemiah added

¹ After an amended version.

the prayer, "Listen, O our God! it is thus that we are scoffed at. Let their scorn return upon their own heads, and make them a prey to their enemies in a land of captivity. Cover not their unrighteousness and forget not their sin, for they bitterly taunted the builders?" The vengeful spirit of this prayer is far from surprising in a man to whom the work thus ridiculed was sacred, and in whose ears these taunts were blasphemy.

But unquestionably the Jews themselves had given occasion for such scoffs. They had often, for instance, invoked the help of God with prayer and fast and sacrifice, but without laying a finger to the work themselves. The exhortations to passive faith which the prophets had but too often addressed to their people¹ had been taken more to heart than their moral teachings by those who heard and still more by those who read them. This spirit of passive trust may be traced in the following lines of a psalm, which with all their touching piety would lend themselves but too readily to dangerous abuse:²

If Yahweh build not the house, the workmen labour
in vain;

If Yahweh preserve not the city, the sentry keeps
watch in vain.

It avails not, O ye who rise early, sit late, and eat
bread that is earned in toil!

For He gives the same to his loved ones even while
they sleep!

Can we not fancy the joyful emotion with which the Jews, in the days of Jerusalem's humiliation, would listen to the following poem:³

To thee do I lift up mine eyes,

To thee, enthroned in the heavens!

¹ Compare Vol. III., p. 375, and elsewhere.

² Psalm cxxvii. 1, 2.

³ Psalm cxxiii.

Behold, as slaves look to their master's hand,
And a maid watches for a gift from her mistress,
So do we look to Yahweh, our god,
Till he shall be gracious to us.
Pity us, then, O Yahweh !
Pity us ! we have had our fill of contempt ;
We have been filled with the scorn of the boastful,
With the scoffs of the proud !

It was a sweet consolation in their misery to rouse one another's courage with the words :¹

I lift up mine eyes to the mountains,
From whence my help shall come.
Help comes from Yahweh,
Creator of heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to stumble ;
He that preserves thee will not slumber.
Nay, he will neither slumber nor sleep,
The preserver of Israel.
Yahweh is thy preserver ;
Yahweh, the shadow from the South.
The sun shall not smite thee by day,
Nor the moon by night.
Yahweh shall keep thee from every trouble ;
Yes, he shall keep thee !
Yahweh shall protect thy coming and going
From now to eternity.

This is a truly beautiful poem ; but if the faithful allowed their trust in Yahweh's help to supersede their own efforts, the only result must be their social and moral ruin.

There had often been good cause to reproach the Jews with being readier to pray than to work, and the reproach

¹ Psalm cxxi.

was now repeated by their enemies ; but, with Nehemiah at the head of affairs, there was little danger of its being deserved ; as the scoffers were soon to see. The work made rapid progress, and before its opponents had time to think it was half completed. Evidently the workmen were throwing their whole souls into it. So when Sanballat and his friends saw that "these feeble Jews" were really making progress, they came together once more, in greater numbers, to take counsel.

Their plans were soon made. They would rush upon the walls and take the city by surprise. But the plot leaked out, and Nehemiah was not the man to content himself with praying against it ! He did indeed implore his god for help, but he also set watch by day and night. The work, however, became very burdensome under all these circumstances, and Nehemiah was constantly hearing complaints from the workers. It was almost too much for them ; they were worn out ; the heaps of rubbish were so enormous ! Terror sank into many a heart, for, in spite of the watch, the enemy might come at any moment. And on ten separate occasions Jews, who were settled near one or other of the hostile tribes, came to warn their relatives or fellow-villagers, while engaged upon the work, that they had better go back home. We may well believe how little Nehemiah was disposed to permit such desertions ; but he ordered everyone to give up building for a time, armed all the men of military age, made the necessary preparations for repelling an attack, and earnestly exhorted the captains and soldiers to fight bravely for their wives and children.

But it did not come to blows. When the hostile party heard how well Nehemiah and his friends were prepared for them, they relinquished their project and allowed the building to proceed after only a short delay. But Nehemiah did not slacken his precautions. He kept half of his own men

under arms day and night, while the chiefs of the people always stayed close by their men with a store of spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail, so that a moment would suffice to put all the workpeople under arms. Nay, even when at work they were not wholly unarmed, for the overseers handed up the building materials with one hand while they grasped a spear in the other, and the masons, who had to work with both hands, had their swords girt to their sides. Nehemiah and all his staff neither took off their clothes nor laid down their arms day or night. The governor was always accompanied by a trumpeter, and it was agreed that if the trumpet sounded all the chiefs and people were to rush to Nehemiah and present a common front to the foe. We may well believe that the men from outlying districts who had come with their retainers to work at the walls were no longer suffered to slink away by night as they had sometimes done before!

In a word, the task was carried on with the utmost vigour, and Nehemiah was the soul of the undertaking. Sanballat and his friends were well aware of this, and therefore aimed a blow at him. The walls and turrets were now completed, and not a single breach was left. But the gates were not yet restored, and the work was therefore still unfinished. Sanballat and Geshem now pretended to wish to come to some understanding with the governor, and invited him to a conference at Cephira, in the valley of Ono, a few leagues north-west of Jerusalem. Nehemiah suspected them of intending to seize him, and refused to meet them. He could not leave the city, he replied, for it would cause delay in the building. Four times in succession they sent their invitation, but always in vain. Sanballat, however, did not yet despair, but sent a servant with an open letter which said that Geshem had publicly accused Nehemiah of fortifying Jerusalem with the intention of rebelling against the king of

Persia, and that he was even reported to have secured certain prophets who were to proclaim him king in Jerusalem. The letter concluded with a renewed invitation to a conference for the discussion of these matters. Nehemiah's answer was short and sharp: "It is all a lie of your own coining."

Sanballat and Geshem had endeavoured to draw Nehemiah out of Jerusalem, but Tobiah tried another way of bringing about his fall. He found means of inducing a certain prophet Shemaiah to enter into his scheme. Simulating the prophetic mood this man summoned Nehemiah and told him in Yahweh's name that plots had been forged against his life, and he must therefore instantly fly with him to the temple and guard himself against surprise in the sanctuary by closing the doors. It was a subtle plot! If Nehemiah had consented, he would have trespassed against the law by entering the temple, from which, as a layman, he was excluded. This would have undermined his influence with the rigidly orthodox party. Nehemiah, undaunted as ever, answered boldly: "You have mistaken me widely if you think I shall take to flight. And how could a layman enter the sanctuary without losing his life? Never!"

Shemaiah was not the only prophet who endeavoured to alarm Nehemiah. There were several others, amongst whom he mentions the prophetess Noadiah by name. There were also many of his immediate associates upon whom he could not altogether reckon. Tobiah had many connections and friends amongst the chief men of Jerusalem, and the extraordinary number of letters which passed to and fro showed how actively he was keeping up his relations with them; and, indeed, his praises were constantly sounded in the ears of Nehemiah himself. It was obvious that many of the influential men about him heartily desired to see him come to some better understanding with Tobiah.

Years afterwards, when Nehemiah looked back upon the

past and composed his memorials, he could not refrain from uttering a curse upon Sanballat, Tobiah, and the prophets who had resisted him, while he proudly added: "Nevertheless, the walls were finished in two and fifty days!"

And in truth the enterprise, perseverance, courage, and zeal which enabled him to sweep everything before him command our admiration. If he cursed his foes in the name of his god, and enacted measures of merciless exclusion against them, at any rate he laboured unweariedly and risked his very life in the cause of his country and his God.

About this time a great assembly was held in Jerusalem. Nehemiah inserts his record of it in the middle of the account of the rebuilding of the walls, but it seems far more probable that it was held shortly after the completion of that work than while it was still in progress. The occasion of its being summoned was as follows:—

For some time past the poorer Jews, both in Jerusalem and in the surrounding districts, had complained bitterly of the cruel treatment they experienced from their wealthy countrymen. To secure bare sustenance for themselves and their families many of them had pledged their fields and vineyards; others had been driven to the same step in order to pay the taxes due to the king; nay, some had been actually compelled to sell their sons and daughters as slaves, for bread. It was too fearful! Were they not as good as the rich men? Why should they be forced to sell their children and give up their fields?—Such were the complaints that rose, especially from the women, till they reached the ear of Nehemiah. The governor was deeply shocked, and spoke to several of the nobles on the subject. This produced no effect, for one shielded himself behind another in the usual style, till at last Nehemiah took up the affair with the same energy he had already devoted to the rebuilding

of the walls, and summoned an assembly of all the heads of families.

Then he delivered an address, in which he pointed out the constant practice of himself and other Jews in Babylonia. As far as was in their power they had always purchased their countrymen in the slave market from their heathen masters and set them at liberty. What a melancholy contrast was furnished by those who actually sold their brothers! The nobles had nothing to urge against his reproaches; upon which he went on to show that if Israel's shame was ever to be removed, they must walk in the fear of God. He was prepared to set them a good example. He and his relatives, and all the men of his retinue, would cancel all their claims for what they had lent to the poor. He called upon them all to do the same. On the very spot they must return the fields, the vineyards, the olive gardens, and houses they had taken in pledge, and must not demand again the provisions and the money they had lent.—Nehemiah's words produced so deep an impression that the rich men promised everything he required. But the governor was not yet content, and fearing that when his eye was no longer upon them and they came to think the matter over they might shrink from keeping their word, he called for certain priests to take an oath from them. He himself endeavoured to add terror to the oath by a symbolical action. He raised his garment as high as his breast, so as to make it into a kind of sack, and then performed the gesture of shaking it empty, with the words, "If anyone should break his word, may Yahweh shake him out of his house and goods, and make him naked and empty." "Amen! Amen!" cried the people, as they praised Yahweh for setting so strong and merciful a governor over Judah.

When Nehemiah tells us this, and adds that the rich men kept their word, he takes occasion to inform us how unselfish he had always been himself—a fact that is greatly to his

credit, but which we should have preferred to hear from someone else. During the twelve years that he was governor he remitted the allowance for his table in order not to increase the burdens of his poor afflicted people, whereas former governors had levied forty silver shekels a day, besides contributions in kind,¹ for this purpose, and had left their followers far too free to practise extortion and usury. He, on the other hand, feared God far too much to do such things. He and his retinue had even helped in building the walls without any compensation; and he generally entertained at his own table a hundred and fifty nobles and many other Jews who had just come from abroad. Every day one ox, six fattened sheep, with poultry and a great quantity of wine, were served, "and all this," says Nehemiah in conclusion, "I did without the allowance for my table which I might have claimed as governor; for the people were sadly burdened. Reward me, O God! for all the good that I have done to this people!"

Against the enthusiasm of such a man as Nehemiah, backed by the material power he could command as the king's governor, hardly anything could stand. He had been able to alleviate the pinching necessity of the poor by force of persuasion, but he was driven to stronger measures to meet another difficulty. Jerusalem's walls indeed were now rebuilt, and had been solemnly consecrated by a procession of the nobles and priests, which marched in two companies, preceded by music, round the renovated walls, and united again in the temple to offer sacrifice. Great had been the rejoicings on that day; men, women, and children had raised a shout that rang far into the distance. Israel's shame was taken away. The people of Yahweh possessed a fortress once more! But, encouraging as all this was, Jerusalem

¹ Translation uncertain.

still was empty and deserted. No wonder ! The dimensions of the city were the same as when Nebuchadrezzar took it, but the number of its inhabitants was very much smaller. All Judæa was now more sparsely populated than before, and Jerusalem was one of the least eligible places of abode in the land. The means of subsistence there were very scanty, and the district was so barren that the court and the temple furnished almost the only means of livelihood to the men of Jerusalem. Now at present, the people in general were so poor that the temple revenues were not great, and many of the priests into whose hands they flowed for the most part were themselves compelled to live at a distance from the city, doubtless in order to eke out their slender means by agriculture and cattle feeding. The governor's court did indeed bring some activity to the capital, but not nearly so much as that of the king had done in former times. So the Jews, though loud in their praises of Jerusalem, and exalting it to heaven as the holy city, did not choose it as the place of their abode, and the consequence was that behind the renovated walls lay many streets without inhabitants, and perhaps half covered with ruins.

Nehemiah had a remedy for this also. In the first place he provided for a proper watch being kept over the city. His brother Hanani, the commander of the citadel, was a man on whom he could absolutely rely, and under his superintendence he ordered not only laymen, but priests, singers, and Levites to keep watch at the gates in turn, while he expressly instructed Hanani not to allow the city gates to be opened until some time after sunrise, and at night to close them and secure them well with bolt and bar. Then he called the representatives of the people together, and urged them with his usual zeal and animation to settle in Jerusalem. Many of them, especially the wealthier men, who could do it at no great sacrifice, allowed themselves to be persuaded ; but since

they were not sufficiently numerous, the governor succeeded in passing an ordinance that one-tenth of the whole population should come and live in the capital, and that if there were not sufficient volunteers, the lot should decide who were to be compelled to migrate to Jerusalem. It was a hard decree! No wonder that those who were earning their bread elsewhere and did not see how they were to get it in Jerusalem blessed everyone who volunteered to reside there. The rest were selected according to Nehemiah's proposal.

The governor's uncompromising energy had, therefore, secured a sufficient population, voluntary or enforced, to prevent Jerusalem from being an empty waste and a reproach to Yahweh, Israel's god. It was not till after these events that any temple-goer could have expressed his admiration for the holy city in the following words without manifest absurdity:¹

I am glad when they say: Let us go to the house of
Yahweh!

Our feet are standing within thy gates, O Jerusalem!
O Jerusalem, rebuilt, thou city compact together,
To thee do the tribes go up, the tribes of Yahweh!
The community of Israel, to praise the name of
Yahweh.

There stood the thrones of judgment,

The seats of David's race.

Pray for Jerusalem's weal!

A life of peace to them that love thee!

Be joy within thy fortresses!

Thy palaces be blessed!

For friends and brethren's sake I bless thee,

For the house of Yahweh our god will I seek thy
weal.

¹ Psalm cxxii.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE MOSAIC LAW.

NEHEMIAH VIII.—X., XIII.; MALACHI.

NEHEMIAH was a deeply religious man. Prayer was his refuge in every perplexity, and the fear of God was his strongest motive to action. We have already seen clearly enough to which religious school he belonged. The rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and all the care bestowed upon the fortification of the City of the Temple were the fruit of the same spirit which had impelled Ezra to maintain Israel's purity by banishing the foreign wives and their children. We cannot wonder, then, that the great scribe, who in spite of all his zeal had been able as yet to do but little towards introducing the law of Yahweh and reforming the people, now felt himself roused to fresh efforts by the support on which he could rely from the governor.

The seventh month drew near. We are not told the year, but the last date that has been given is that of the completion of the walls on the five and twentieth day of Elul, the sixth month. It is hardly possible that Ezra should have desired to fight another battle the very week after the first victory; and we are therefore inclined to put the events we are about to record in the next year, the second of Nehemiah's governorship, 444 B.C. On the first day of the seventh month, then, a feast-day dear to the Israelites from time of old,¹ the Jews had assembled in more than usual numbers at Jerusalem to bring their wonted offerings and hold their feasts of joy. It was then that certain zealots, who declared that they spoke in the name of the people, requested Ezra to read the law of Yahweh to them. He asked for nothing better. A rostrum was soon erected in the great

¹ Leviticus xxiii. 23—25. Compare p. 229.

open space before the Water-gate, one of the entrances to the temple. There Ezra took his place, with the roll of the Law in his hand. Men and women, boys and girls, a great proportion in fact of the visitors and people of Jerusalem who had come to years of discretion, were walking about or standing in knots in the ample space. On Ezra's right and left distinguished citizens were grouped to give emphasis to his words; and when he ascended the rostrum in the sight of all the crowd and opened the roll of the Law, everyone stood still in reverence and awaited in solemn silence the words he was about to read. He raised his hands to heaven and uttered a prayer to the glory of Yahweh, the god of Israel's covenant, to whose word his people now desired to hearken. "Amen! Amen!" was heard on every side, and all present bowed down twice to the earth. Then the reading began. After going through a few of the precepts Ezra paused, and a number of Levites, thirteen of whom are specially mentioned by name, standing about amongst the people, explained in greater detail what they had heard.

The denunciations against the disobedient which accompanied Yahweh's commandments made such a deep and painful impression on the hearers that many of them, dreading the divine vengeance, burst into tears, for there were many things in which they had not at all conformed to what they were now informed were Yahweh's commands to Moses. But Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levitical teachers met these cries of woe by the exhortation not to forget that it was a feast day, on which they must eat their delicacies and drink their sweet must, and give food to the poor and to all who had nothing of their own. As for the rest, Yahweh would help them. "Hush! hush!" cried the Levites, "this is a holy day, upon which you may not lament!" And the people instantly showed their desire to obey the word of Yahweh by drying up their tears and spending the day in festive mood.

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But on the morrow, when most of those who had come up to the feast were at home again, Ezra summoned the heads of families, together with the principal priests and Levites, and bade them read the regulations of the Feast of Tabernacles that must be held on the fifteenth of that same month.¹ It was the ancient harvest feast which had been celebrated for centuries by Israel, but to which a new significance was now given by the Law, for it was made a commemoration of Israel's wandering in the desert, in memory of which the celebrants were to live in booths made of the branches of various trees and to hold festive social gatherings. Accordingly this feast was celebrated eight days long, in harmony with the regulations in the Law, and with unparalleled splendour. Everywhere, on the flat roofs of the houses, in the courts of the temples, and in more than one open space in Jerusalem, these airy abodes were reared; and there, adorned by day and illuminated by night, they testified for seven days to the rejoicings of the Jews, which took the usual form of dance and song. The feast was introduced on the first day by a solemn service in the sanctuary, and was closed on the eighth by a sacrificial ceremony no less numerously attended.

Now Ezra had not allowed these eight days of intense religious feeling to pass by unused. Day after day he had collected the pilgrims round the rostrum, and made them acquainted with the Law. Thus he had made his preparations for the time when he could strike the blow, as he had done thirteen years before, and carry Israel with him in the great reforms he had in view. It was agreed that two days after the time of rejoicing was over, the faithful should return to Jerusalem, not in joy, however, but in mourning garments. Then they might indulge the grief which had seized them three weeks ago, and mourn for Israel's faithlessness.

¹ Leviticus xxiii. 33—43.

We may easily guess who they were that assembled in the temple court on that twenty-fourth of Tisri. Certainly not all the Jews were there ; but the strictly orthodox, the zealots for Yahweh's law and Israel's purity, were represented in great strength. There were doubtless some present who would rather have been absent, were it not that Nehemiah, the governor, supported Ezra and zealously furthered his schemes ; but in any case, those who were connected with foreigners would not be there, and the few prophets still left in Jerusalem, together with all those who felt that Ezra's religion was too exclusive, would be sure to keep in the background. Not many introductory words were needed. All who were present knew what they had come for. They were clad in mourning, had dust upon their heads, and observed the strictest fast. See how they strike their breasts, and how the most zealous have pushed forward to the pulpits of the Levites and are testifying to their emotion by loud cries of guilt ! Woe, woe to Israel ! They, too, are sinners, as their fathers were before them ! How many times has Yahweh smitten his people because of their unrighteousness ? And yet they have not repented ! Cursed be they who have married with the heathen ! Alas for the deserted service of the temple ! How often Yahweh's altar is empty, while want pinches his priests ! And how the sabbath is desecrated ! Woe, woe upon Israel ! O Yahweh, pity thy people ! Such were the cries continually uttered with the characteristic passion of the Orientals during the first three hours of the day while the book of Law was being read once more. For the next three hours the penitents continued to utter more and more passionate confessions of guilt and prayers to Yahweh. Then certain Levites came amongst them, and strained their emotion to a yet higher pitch by calling aloud upon Yahweh, their god. When the tension was at its climax, when the multitude, completely broken by the sense of guilt and

apprehension, had fallen to the ground, a voice was heard from the rostrum saying, "Stand up and praise Yahweh, your god, for ever!" and some one uttered a long prayer to the Creator of heaven and earth, the god of Israel's covenant, in which his mighty deeds were commemorated, the people's sins deplored, and a promise of improvement made in their name. The Hebrew text does not say that it was Ezra himself who spoke, but the Greek translation does, and there is nothing to prevent our supposing that in this instance it has preserved a correct tradition.

So when the day had thus worn on in fasting and prayer, the great resolve was made. A document had been prepared in advance, which promised that those who signed it would thenceforth observe the Law. It was now read out, received with acclamation, and signed by twenty priests, almost as many Levites, and four and forty laymen. The main provisions of the oath thus taken were to avoid all marriages with foreigners, to do no business on the sabbath, strictly to observe the sabbatical year, and to pay a poll-tax of a third of a shekel (about five pence) towards the expenses of the sanctuary. All who signed the document undertook to provide wood for the sanctuary in rotation, as fixed by lot, and they all solemnly promised their firstlings, their first-fruits, and their tithes, the necessary arrangements for the due collection and distribution of which were made. Then the assembly dissolved.

Of course this solemn resolution had not won the game for the stricter Jews. Their opponents were still numerous and many of their supporters half-hearted. A series of ordinances regulating the external conditions of the religious life, or as we should express it a system of ecclesiastical laws, cannot be permanently stamped upon a people's heart in a moment. It long requires support from the strong arm of

the secular power, and is long subject to infringement before custom finally succeeds in making it impossible to imagine an earnest man refusing to submit to it. Such was the course of events in Israel also. As long as Ezra and Nehemiah kept their hands on the work, the Law came more and more into honour, the temple offerings were brought with increasing regularity, the strict observance of the sabbath gained ground, and the line between Israelites and heathens was more and more sharply drawn. But when the governor was compelled to return to the Persian court after twelve years residence in Palestine, and probably Ezra was dead, many of the Jews threw off the yoke of the Law; so that when Nehemiah obtained permission to return once more to Jerusalem, after the lapse of a considerable time, he found plenty of work to do.

He appears to have come in the capacity of governor on this occasion also. At any rate he had ample power, though not more than he needed, for it was as much as ever he could do to bring the offenders to a sense of their duty or banish them from the land, and to counteract the abuses which had once again crept in. The men who had defied the law of Yahweh stood in no mean position, but were influential and powerful citizens. Foremost amongst them was Eliashib the priest, probably the high priest of that name. He had granted Tobiah, the old opponent of Ezra and Nehemiah, the use of a room in one of the temple magazines, which was previously used as a storehouse for sacrificial implements and incense. Nehemiah took vigorous measures against this abuse. He had Tobiah's furniture thrown out and the chamber purified, after which it was restored to its former uses.

But the fact was that the whole machinery of worship had relapsed into decay. Tithes were no longer paid. Many of the Levites and singers had been driven by necessity to

settle in the country, where they could support themselves by agriculture. Nehemiah sharply reprov'd the heads of the people for standing by while the house of God was poor and destitute; and when his repeated exhortations had quicken'd the flow of gifts to the temple, he rearrang'd the whole matter on a permanent footing, and entrusted the receipt and disbursement of the temple revenues to properly selected officers. He himself attach'd so much importance to these measures that in recording them he adds the prayer, "Reward me, O my God! for this deed, and forget not the benefits I have done to the temple and its servants!"

It was a still harder task to compel the people of Jerusalem to observe the sabbath strictly. The mass of the citizens and their leaders, to the great scandal of the devout, employ'd the seventh day in work. They press'd their olives and got in their harvest, and there was often such a rush of asses laden with wine, grapes, figs, and what not, that no one would have thought it was the day of Yahweh at all. Nay, there was a regular provision market! In the quarter of the Tyrians especially, which was full of fishmongers, there was a scandalous press of business on the sabbath. It is true that the heathen traders could not be blamed for this, but their customers were Jews. Nehemiah brought the facts to the attention of the magistrates, and demand'd vigorous proceedings against this sacrilege. Had not the neglect of the sabbath been one of the main causes of Israel's fall? With the assent of the magistrates Nehemiah closed the city gates before the beginning of the sabbath, and set some of his own retainers to watch them and prevent any wares from being introduced. But even this was not enough; for the traders now spent Saturday and the preceding night just outside the gates, and who could prevent the people of Jerusalem from going out and trading with them there? When this had gone on a few weeks, Nehemiah sent word to the traders that

if he ever found them so near the walls on the eve of the sabbath again he should expel them by force. This step was successful; and, since he could not permanently spare his own guard to watch the gate, he charged the Levites with the duty of defending the sanctity of the sabbath henceforth.

But the hardest task of all was to meet the old evil of mixed marriages. In spite of the zeal with which they had been attacked, they were still frequent. Nehemiah even met with Jews, perhaps in border districts, whose children spoke a language more like Phœnician, Ammonitish, or Moabitish, than Hebrew, which latter they were not able properly to understand. He reproached the parents with words of burning indignation. Had not heathen women been the cause of Solomon's fall? Such conduct could bring nothing but misery upon the country. Away with all these strangers! Nor was he content with mere words, but when some of them hesitated to dismiss their wives and children on the spot, he seized them in a transport of zeal and scourged them and tore out their hair. By fair means or foul he would force them to submit!

In Jerusalem itself severe measures were required; for one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of the high priest Elias-hib, had married a daughter of Sanballat, the Horonite, of whom we have heard before, and he now refused to dismiss her. Nehemiah succeeded in getting him banished. "O God!" he wrote when recording these events, "punish those who have thus desecrated the priesthood!"

This son of Jehoiada cannot have been the only priest who showed small reverence for Yahweh's law; for if the majority of the servants of the temple had been averse to intercourse with strangers, such a marriage would hardly have been contracted by one so high in office, nor would one of the temple buildings have been granted to Tobiah. We

could scarcely expect any strictness on such points from men who were careless even in enforcing the ordinances of which they were the special guardians as priests. And that such laxity existed is evident from the fact that they frequently allowed people to sacrifice animals which had some defect, such as lameness or blindness, though this was, of course, prohibited.¹ "A son honours his father, a servant his master. If I am a father, how am I honoured? If I am a master, how am I feared?" says Yahweh. "Oh, priests who despise my name, can you still ask in what your contempt appears? You bring unclean offerings to my altar and then complain yourselves that Yahweh's table is despised. Is it no sin to bring a blind, lame, or sick beast for a sacrifice to me? Only offer such a beast to your governor! Do you think he would grant the request accompanied by such a present? Neither do I," says Yahweh, "take pleasure in you or accept such presents; I, who am honoured amongst the heathen, from the East even to the West. A curse upon the miser who brings me a defective victim, though he has a better—me, the great king, honoured and dreaded everywhere. Woe to you, priests! If you despise me thus, you are accursed. I would have Levi honour me. Life and blessing have I promised him because he feared me and my law was upon his lips, for out of the mouth of the priest comes knowledge, and from his lips my commands are received, since he is a messenger of Yahweh of war-hosts. But you depart from the right way, and make many stumble in the observance of the Law; you break the covenant of Levi," says Yahweh.²

The man who told the priests the truth so roundly was Malachi. He appeared at Jerusalem, rebuking the people for their sins and announcing the day of Yahweh's judgment, probably during Nehemiah's second stay in the city. If he

¹ Deuteronomy xv. 21, xvii. 1; Leviticus xxii. 17—25.

² Malachi i. 6—ii. 9.

regarded the desecration of the altar by the priests as an abomination, he was no less zealous in denouncing the neglect of worship by the people.¹ "You weary Yahweh," he exclaimed, "by the words you utter! Do you ask how so? By blasphemously saying, 'Surely whoever does evil is acceptable to Yahweh,' or, 'Where is the God who judges?' Behold I send my messenger to prepare a way for me. Of a sudden shall the Lord, for whose coming you look, appear in his temple, and the angel of the covenant for whom you long shall approach, says Yahweh of war-hosts. And who shall be able to endure that day, which will be like a burning furnace and like bleaching soap? Then shall he sit in judgment and purify the sons of Levi as gold and silver are purified, that you may henceforth bring good gifts to Yahweh, and that Judah's and Jerusalem's offerings may be acceptable to him as of old. Then shall I come against you in judgment and punish the magicians and adulterers, who swear falsely and hold back the labourer's wages, the oppressors of the widow, the orphan, and the stranger, all who fear not me, says Yahweh. Think not that I have changed, O sons of Jacob! Had I changed you would have been consumed already; for you have departed from my ordinances since the days of old. Turn again to me; then will I turn again to you. Do you ask how you are to turn to me again? Then do you think a man may steal from God? Do you ask how you steal from him? By holding back his tithes and offerings. Cursed are ye, because ye steal from me. Aye! the whole people steals! Bring the tithes into my storehouse that there may be food in my house. Only put me to the test and see if I do not open the windows of heaven for you then, and pour out abundant blessings upon you. Then shall I curse the locusts for your sake, that they may not consume your produce; then your vines shall not fail you,

¹ Malachi ii. 17-iv. 6.

and all the heathen shall pronounce you blessed, for your land shall be a joy to look on."

"Your words," cries the prophet again, "are an offence to me, says Yahweh. Do you ask me why? Because you say: 'It is vain to serve God. What does it profit us to observe his commandments and to humble ourselves in sack-cloth and ashes for our shortcomings? The arrogant are the truly blessed, and with evildoers all goes well. They put God to the test, and he does not punish them.'—Then they that feared God spoke of these things together and Yahweh observed, and it was written down in the book of remembrance that lies before him for the sake of those that fear him. They shall be mine, said Yahweh, in the day which I shall make arise. Then will I spare them as one spares his son, and you shall discern between the fate of the righteous and of the godless. For behold! the day of Yahweh is coming, burning like a furnace. All the proud and the wicked shall be like stubble set aflame by that day, says Yahweh of hosts, who will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name shall the sun of deliverance arise with healing beneath his wings, and your prosperity shall still increase. And you shall tread down the godless like dust beneath your feet, says Yahweh.—Think then of the Law of Moses, my servant, which I gave him on Mount Horeb for all Israel, with all its ordinances and institutions. Behold, I send you Elijah, the prophet, before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes. He shall turn the heart of the fathers back to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, that I may not smite the land with a curse when I come!"

These words are full of fire, for the glow of Malachi's zeal is as hot as that of the greatest prophets. But in listening to his oracles, we are painfully impressed by the extreme importance which he obviously attaches to everything

connected with forms of worship. We ought, in fairness, to note that other and more important matters also engaged his thoughts, and that he discussed the questions connected with foreign marriages, though the hopeless state of the text in this passage¹ prevents our giving any account of it. Again, his threats are directed not only against those who hold back Yahweh's tithes, but against adulterers, against the untruthful, the cruel, and the sinful generally. But yet he dwells at greatest length on trespasses against the formal laws of worship, and sums up all his exhortations in the words, "Remember the law of Moses, with its precepts and institutions!" Malachi is a prophet, but he is steeped in the priestly spirit. He has, indeed, adopted from the ancient men of God their spirit of national pride. His book begins with the words:² "I love you, O Israel, says Yahweh. Do you doubt it? Esau was Jacob's brother, yet I loved Jacob and hated Esau, and laid waste his mountain land. Edom may say: Although we are poor yet we shall rebuild what has been destroyed; but Yahweh says: Let them but begin and I will break down their work; and men shall call them: Land of godlessness, people against whom Yahweh is wrath for ever. And thou shalt see it and shalt cry: May Yahweh be glorified beyond the boundaries of Israel's land!"—But where is the breadth of view of the ancient messengers of Yahweh? Where is the noble conception: Mercy and not sacrifice! which makes Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah heralds of a better time? Not a trace of it in Malachi! Alas, if the priestly spirit had already made its power felt in Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah, in Malachi we see still more clearly that the end of prophecy is drawing near, for it cannot flourish where the Law with its institutions and ordinances is supreme.

¹ Malachi ii. 10—16.

Malachi i. 1—5.

And to such supremacy the Law had now attained. Israel had definitely set its foot upon the path which was to make it "the people of the book." Whoever cherished freer conceptions or refused to bow beneath the yoke of the Law was banished or silenced. Nehemiah could look back upon his career with the feelings of a conqueror. It had, indeed, been a hard task, but he had compelled his people to accept the "institutions and ordinances." With a strong arm he had supported the great scribe, Ezra, who had introduced the book of Yahweh's law.

As for Ezra himself, it is no wonder that the Jewish teachers of later ages extolled him as a second Moses. He was, in truth, the father of Judaism. It was his work that gave the Jewish people that peculiar character that has since distinguished it from all the peoples, and has kept it in existence to this day in spite of all adversities, in spite of its dispersion, in spite of century upon century of persecution. We have seen that Ezra created nothing new, but only built on the foundations laid by the fathers; for ever since Josiah's time Israel had been advancing in the direction in which he urged it so decisively, and which he made it pursue with deliberate and conscious purpose. Judaism was no more Ezra's creation than the worship of Yahweh was that of Moses. But the zeal with which he and Nehemiah opposed the progress of freer conceptions which would tend to make Israel melt away amongst the heathens was crowned with success. They were themselves the children of their age, and they bequeathed their spirit to posterity.

We admire their energy and perseverance, but we cannot admire their work. They did much towards petrifying Israel by the worship of forms and the spirit of the Law.

Let us now examine the Law they introduced more narrowly, and illustrate its most important precepts.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MOSAIC LAW.

NUMBERS V. 11-31; LEVITICUS XVI.; NUMBERS VI. 1-21; EXODUS XXXI. 12-17; LEVITICUS XXV.

"**B**E holy, for Yahweh is holy;" such was the principle which the noblest of the prophets had endeavoured to stamp on their people's hearts; and such also was the motto inscribed on the banner of the priests who laboured in the spirit of Ezra. To make Yahweh's people holy, that it might be worthy of him and separated from the heathen, was their ideal. But what a difference of conception as to holiness between such men as Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah on the one hand and the compilers of these laws, which Yahweh was said to have given to Moses, on the other! The former insisted, in the name of God's holiness, on virtue and purity, on integrity, chastity, temperance, beneficence. The priests, on the other hand, insisted on ceremonial, or as it is commonly called Levitical, purity. Uncleanness might be caused by a hundred such things, as touching a dead body, a grave, the carcase of an unclean animal, or even of a clean animal that had not been slaughtered according to the law, contact with unclean people, with certain expiatory offerings (an example of which we shall presently come to), with so-called leprous houses or clothes, with anything connected with the sexual functions of men or women, and finally with forbidden kinds of food.¹ The prophets had preached "mercy and not sacrifice;" but the priests and their supporters insisted upon the mechanical performance of all manner of ceremonies. We see from the examples of Ezra and Nehemiah how they devoted their zeal to the maintenance of sabbath observances, to the care of the temple, to the celebration of feasts and the offering of sacrifices.

¹ Compare Vol. V., pp. 353 ff.; VI., chapter xxxi.

When we contemplate the host of precepts which they gave the faithful, we naturally ask where all these forms and ceremonies came from. Did the priests deliberately invent them to give expression to their religious ideas, or did they borrow them from elsewhere? In the latter case, whence did they obtain them?—The answer cannot be the same in every case, for the precepts differ widely in their origin.

We may describe a great many of them as of heathen or ancient Israelitish origin; and those two denominations are nearly equivalent, for when Moses promulgated the law of the Ten Commandments and introduced the worship of Yahweh, the different tribes had numerous and varied religious usages already, many of which they shared with non-Israelitish peoples. A number of these customs were subsequently branded by the strict Mosaists as heathenish, and we have seen that this fact gave rise to violent religious conflicts, especially under Hezekiah and Josiah.

Now the compilers of the so-called Mosaic law opposed the heathen practices in some respects with the utmost energy, but in some only. In the first place they sternly forbade all worship of foreign gods. The belief that Yahweh was the only God was distinctly premised by the priests who lived in and after the Captivity. Again, they absolutely condemn all image worship, together with the use of *massebahs*, *asherahs*, *chammanim*, and *bamahs*, and other practices connected with it. They emphatically support the far-reaching principle of Deuteronomy, that sacrifices may only be offered in the temple at Jerusalem, and only by the priests appointed by Yahweh. Again, they condemn as Canaanitish the practices of magic, human sacrifice (especially of children), and incontinuity in honour of the deity, while many other ancient usages no doubt received their death-blow from the silence of the Law.

But, on the other hand, the priests adopted and confirmed

many practices which were in no way connected with the principles of Mosaism, and in some cases were actually opposed to them. Sometimes they modified them, but generally they took them just as they found them. Thus they remained, and for the most part still remain in honour, though their significance was completely lost. The rite of circumcision, for instance, was passed over in silence by the Deuteronomic legislation, though presupposed by it,¹ but is expressly enjoined in the Book of Origins.² Subsequent legislators only mention it incidentally.³ Again, without understanding the origin of the distinction between clean and unclean animals, the priests had adopted it from the people even as early as in Josiah's reign,⁴ nor did they relinquish it during the Captivity, though they found themselves compelled to repeal one regulation and allow the locust and three other creatures to be eaten, though they were previously forbidden.⁵ It must also have been an old usage, which the priests who took it up into the Law would have been at a loss to explain, by which a woman who had given birth to a child was regarded as unclean for forty days if it were a boy, but eighty if it were a girl.⁶ Other similar instances might be cited.

A few examples may be given of old heathen usages which were taken up into the Law. One of them is the ordeal of the "water of jealousy,"⁷ which was applied as follows :

When a man suspected his wife of infidelity, but could not prove it, he took her to the priest, at the same time bringing him a specified present for Yahweh. It consisted of two quarts of barley meal, without the usual addition of oil and incense. It was the gift of jealousy, and was intended to call Yahweh's attention to the suspected transgression. Then the priest led the woman to the altar, took some conse-

¹ Deuteronomy x. 16, xxx. 6.

² Genesis xvii.

³ Leviticus xii. 3.

⁴ Deuteronomy xiv. 3—20.

⁵ Leviticus xi. See especially v. 22.

⁶ Leviticus xii.

⁷ Numbers v. 11—31.

crated water in a new vessel, and put a little dust from the floor of the temple into it. Then he uncovered the woman's head by removing her veil, and told her to hold the offering of barley meal in her hands while he held the water of cursing. Then she must swear that she had not been untrue to her husband, upon which the priest uttered fearful imprecations upon her should her statement be false. The water would do her no harm if she were innocent; but if her oath were false it would undoubtedly destroy her, and she would fall a misshapen corpse upon the ground. To all this the woman must signify her assent by crying "Amen, amen!" If she had the courage to do this the priest then took a tablet, wrote the curse upon it, and made the consecrated water flow over the letters that it might acquire the power of fulfilling the curse. All this time the woman had to stand with the meal before the altar, but the priest now took it from her, waved it to and fro before Yahweh to excite his attention, sprinkled a handful of it in the fire upon the altar, and then gave the woman the water to drink. "Without doubt," adds the lawgiver, "that draught shall be a curse to her if she has been faithless. Her thighs shall sink away and her body shall swell, and her name shall become a curse in Israel. But," he concludes, "if she is guiltless she will remain uninjured and will taste the joys of motherhood. This is the law concerning jealousy."

This draught of the "water of cursing," with its gross superstitiousness and its strong testimony to the power of the conscience, was certainly not the only form of ordeal current amongst the Israelites. In legalising and regulating this mode of decision the priests very likely did a great service by causing the disuse of many dangerous forms of ordeal.

When treating of the Feast of Passover¹ we remarked that

¹ Vol. II., pp. 47 ff.

the priest who regulated its ceremonies probably borrowed some of them from ancient usages which he saw no chance of abolishing, and invented some of them himself to bring the festival as nearly as possible into harmony with the explanation he had given of it. The same may be said of all the festivals, as regulated by the priests after the Captivity. Chief amongst these festivals are the three already enjoined by the earlier legislation,¹ namely, Passover, the Feast of Weeks (generally called Pentecost, or the Feast of the Fiftieth Day), and Tabernacles; then comes the celebration of every new moon,² especially that of the seventh month,³ and then the great Day of Atonement.⁴ What had the celebration of the reappearance of the moon to do with the worship of Yahweh? Nothing in the world. The people were evidently too much attached to certain usages, which pointed back to their ancient worship of the moon-goddess, for the priests to see any possibility of abolishing them. Accordingly they included them amongst the feasts in honour of Yahweh, and carefully defined the sacrifices that must be made upon them. In no instance were the gifts due to Yahweh at a feast left to the generosity of the faithful. They were always accurately defined.⁵ Everything was arranged in a truly priestly spirit.

The usages of the great Day of Atonement, on the tenth day of the seventh month, deserve especial attention.⁶ The business of this day, which is still regarded by the Jews as peculiarly holy, was a general purification from sin. It is true that definite sacrifices, ablutions, and separations were prescribed to meet every possible trespass and voluntary or involuntary pollution; but how easily might an Israelite

¹ Exodus xxiii. 14—17; Deuteronomy xvi. 1—16.

² Numbers xxviii. 11—15.

³ Leviticus xxiii. 23—25.

⁴ Leviticus xxiii. 26—32.

⁵ Numbers xxviii., xxix., and elsewhere.

⁶ Leviticus x

become unclean by walking over a grave, for instance, or touching an unclean person, without ever so much as knowing it! Moreover the sanctuary itself was in the midst of a sinful people, and both it and all the apparatus of sacrifice were constantly being polluted, and therefore stood in need of purification. Upon this day accordingly, the only fast prescribed by the Law, a general purification conducted by the high priest in person took place.

He began by purifying himself. First he bathed, and instead of his magnificent official robes put on the simple linen garments of an ordinary priest. Then he took a bullock for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, in order that he and the whole priesthood might be worthy mediators with Yahweh. When these animals were ready, but before they were sacrificed, two goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering were brought to the high priest on behalf of the community. Lots were cast for the two goats, and the one that fell to Yahweh was set aside for a sin offering, while the other was reserved for Azazel. Then the sacrificial ceremonies began. The priests' bullock was slaughtered, after which the high priest entered the holy of holies, with a pan of fire well supplied with incense, which he deposited before the sacred covering of the ark, that its fumes might prevent his seeing the place where Yahweh was enthroned, which would have cost him his life. Meanwhile no one was allowed to enter the sanctuary. Then the priest came out for the blood of the slaughtered ox, raised the curtain a second time, and, enveloped in the smoke of the incense, sprinkled the blood of his sacrifice upon the covering of the ark towards the east, and then sprinkled it seven times in front, or to the east, of the ark. After this he returned and slaughtered the people's goat that had been assigned to Yahweh, and performed the same ceremonies with its blood as he had already done with that of his own sacrifice. Then he went

all round the sanctuary, and sprinkled it first with the blood of the bullock and then with that of the goat, and then in like manner sprinkled the horns of the altar. At last he turned to the living goat, assigned to Azazel, solemnly laid both his hands upon its head, uttered a general confession of guilt in a loud voice in the name of all Israel, laid all those iniquities upon the beast, and then handed it over to a man who stood ready to receive it. This man brought the "scapegoat" of Israel to the desert, and drove it away into it that it might carry away all the sins of Israel into the barren land. Meanwhile the high priest took off his clothes, bathed, put on his official robes, and so returned to the altar, where he offered the burnt sacrifices, first his own, and afterwards that of the people. The flesh and hides of the sin offerings, all except the fat which was laid on the altar, were carried away by a man who was not a priest, and were burnt in a remote place. This man, as well as the one who had taken away the "scapegoat," had to change his clothes and bathe, and might not return to the camp till evening.

In this, as in other priestly ordinances, we find the compiler putting the description of his own ideal into the mouth of Moses, and he therefore speaks throughout of the tent of conference instead of the temple, of the camp and the desert, and of Aaron instead of the high priest. His ideal was incapable of being completely realised, for to begin with there was no ark of the covenant in Zerubbabel's temple; but it serves none the less to indicate the direction of his aspirations. What is the subject matter, then, of his ordinances? How far does it naturally flow from the spirit of Yahweh-worship? Surely there is little in it to remind us of Yahweh's great representatives, the noblest of the prophets. It is true that the confession of guilt and sin may recall to our minds the preachers of repentance, but they would have felt small sympathy with such a formal and external conception

of sin, or the notion that the sanctuary with all its apparatus was polluted by the involuntary transgressions of Israel. What was the origin of the anxiety to fill the holy of holies with the fumes of incense lest the high priest should die when he entered? It sprang from the childlike belief that whoever saw Yahweh would die, which had superseded the still older idea that he held familiar converse with men, but was in its turn foreign to the loftier and purer conception of his being which had found its chief exponent in the Second Isaiah. The goat "for Azazel" has been a sore perplexity to the commentators, and we have not yet discovered the meaning of the word, which only occurs in this passage. But the connection in which we find it here is quite enough to put us on the right track. It is clear that the lawgiver is introducing no fresh name, nor issuing any new injunctions at all, but is simply legalising a familiar ceremony. Azazel is a proper name, most likely of a god who was supposed to dwell in waste places—a sort of Pan or satyr. Many Jewish families, we may suppose, had worshipped him in former times, and still retained certain usages connected with the name of Azazel, though they themselves no longer knew the origin or the significance either of the name or the rites connected with it. Just in the same way as many of us still play with Easter eggs or at Christmas games without in the least suspecting that we are really perpetuating the usages of ancient heathen religions,¹ so these Judæans once a year drove a goat into the desert "to Azazel," with shouts and curses, though they did not know why. The lawgiver, who had no power and very likely no desire to abolish so inveterate a custom, incorporated it in the Law and made it a part of the great day of atonement.

Sometimes the lawgivers show an unmistakable shrewdness in their partial or complete legalisation of ancient customs.

¹ See Vol. I., p. 137.

When was there ever a priesthood without ambition and without the art of turning things to the best account? Much skill of this description is shown by the legislator who regulated the vow of the nazirites. The ancient custom of taking the nazirite vow for life¹ can hardly have been acceptable to the priests; for these men, who abstained from wine and bore on their heads "the crown of Yahweh" in their unshorn locks, formed a spiritual order independent of the priesthood and highly honoured by the people; whereas any kind of sanctity which required no assistance from the priests, and was fostered upon other principles than theirs, would naturally excite their jealousy. What, then, was the course they adopted? They made regulations for a temporary vow which included not only abstinence from wine and letting the hair grow, but also the strictest precautions against ceremonial uncleanness and minute regulations as to the course to be pursued in the unfortunate case of the sudden death of a near relative necessitating the vow's being broken by contact with a corpse. Last, not least, they expressly prescribed the sacrifices which the nazirite must offer at the close of the period for which he had taken the vow, so that he could not be released from it without the help of the priests.²

In many instances the laws give evidence of having been drawn up in priestly schools in accordance with abstract principles, though not without reference to existing usages. This is most obvious in the regulations concerning sacrifices and the sabbath.

Sacrifice occupies a prominent place in all ancient religions. It was equally impossible to approach a prince or a deity for the purpose of making a request without bringing a present to him. The Israelite was as averse as others to "appear before the face of his gods empty handed." We

¹ See Vol. II., p. 280.

² Numbers vi. 1-21.

should therefore expect to find great prominence given to sacrifice in the legislation of the priests, for they did not stand much higher than the people themselves ; and, moreover, the fact that they lived to some extent on the proceeds of the altar, gave them a direct interest in encouraging sacrifices. The Mosaic law, accordingly, not only prescribes numerous sacrifices, but divides them into different classes, and defines the kind of animals and other offerings which the faithful must bring on each of the several occasions specified, and how the victims are to be dealt with in each case. It would be of little use to sum up all the priestly regulations on these subjects, and moreover the precepts given at different periods are sometimes contradictory. We may well be content with touching on some of the main points.¹

The priests distinguished four kinds of sacrifices. First of all came the burnt offerings, which were placed almost entire upon the altar and were consumed with fire. This was the most solemn kind of sacrifice. It served as a recognition of Yahweh's supreme power, and was performed every day. Night and morning, in the name of all the people, a lamb was offered as a burnt sacrifice, with a specified quantity of meal, oil, and wine, all of which were doubled on the sabbath.² Next came the thank offerings, only a small part of which was laid upon the altar, while the rest furnished a festive meal to the offerers, after a due portion had been set aside for the priest. Finally, there were the sin and guilt offerings. The priests evidently made some distinction between these two, though it is anything but clear in what it consisted. The guilt offering appears to have been prescribed in the case of grosser transgressions. It was often coupled with restitution, and it required a male victim, generally a ram ; whereas the sin offering, for which a female animal would do, was demanded by slighter trespasses. Of

¹ Leviticus i.—v.

² Numbers xxviii. 1--10.

course no festive meal would follow these sacrifices. Only a part of the victim was burnt, but all the rest was given to the priests, who were compelled to eat it in the sanctuary, and might not take it home.

The purpose of these atoning sacrifices, as well as of the burnt sacrifices, was to obtain forgiveness, which, according to the doctrine of the priests, was secured by the blood of the victims. For in a certain passage in the Law we read: ¹ "The soul of a living creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for you, for the blood makes atonement by the soul that is in it." Volumes have been written upon this expression! It has been asked whether Yahweh accepted the soul of the victim instead of that of the offerer, and in that case whether the guilt of the sinner was transferred to the beast, with other questions of a like nature. But we must remember that such questions as these throw no light upon the origin of the guilt offerings, which is no such great mystery after all. It is simply due to the childlike idea that when the deity was offended he must be propitiated by a present. The priest who indulged in this speculation as to "the soul in the blood," did so not by way of explaining the idea that underlay the sacrifices of atonement, but in order to impress upon the Israelites, and even the foreigners dwelling in the land, the necessity of abstaining from the use of flesh with blood in it. As to the question whether the Jews regarded the slaughtered victim as taking the place of the offender who offered it, we need only remark that the conception of vicarious suffering was quite familiar both to them and to the peoples of antiquity in general. Redemption by substitution or fine was frequently prescribed; and, just as Abram in the legend offered a ram "in place of" his son,² so the Israelite undoubtedly regarded the animal as taking his place when

¹ Leviticus xvii. 11.

² Genesis xxii. 13.

he had laid his hand upon it with a confession of guilt, and thus recognised it as his sacrifice and, as it were, offered it himself.

It was anything but a good deed which the priests had done in prescribing these several atoning sacrifices and enjoining all these purifications. Nothing could be better calculated to blunt the conscience. It is true that it was not every offence which the Law allowed to be thus washed out, and that intentional transgressions were threatened with death, but the line between intentional and unintentional offences is very hard to draw. Must a careless oath, for instance, be regarded as an intentional transgression? The lawgiver allows such "lip-deeds" to be expunged by a guilt offering,¹ but to place them on a line with involuntary pollution is to impair the moral sense, and to remove us far from the position in which such men as Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah place their hearers. What a contrast between these minute subdivisions of the diverse sacrifices and the free spirit of the prophet who exclaimed:² "Treat your burnt offerings like ordinary sacrifices and make a meal of them! For when you came out of Egypt I gave you no precepts about these things, says Yahweh, but commanded you to obey me."

Nehemiah's inexorable severity in enforcing the observance of the sabbath was altogether in the spirit of the priestly legislators, who insisted with all their might upon the ancient precept, "Remember to hallow the day of rest." They regarded the sabbath as the everlasting token of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel, constantly reminding the people of their call to holiness. The penalty assigned to the desecration of this sacred day was nothing short of death; for had not even Yahweh himself rested after six days labour?³

¹ Leviticus v. 4.

² Jeremiah vii. 21-23.

³ Exodus xxxi. 12-17.

There is a priestly story which enforces the fact that sabbath-breaking was punishable with death by telling of a man who was discovered gathering sticks on the sabbath, during the wanderings in the desert. At first he was simply kept in confinement; as no one knew what ought to be done to him, but after a time he was stoned to death at Yahweh's express command.¹ Not content with prescribing rest in general terms, the lawgivers endeavoured accurately to determine how far this abstinence from work must be carried, and what kinds of employment were forbidden. They declared it illegal to light a fire² or to prepare food, and appealed to the experience of their forefathers in the desert, for whom a double portion of the miraculous food provided by Yahweh always fell upon the Friday, while there was none at all to be found on the sabbath, and those who persisted in going to look for it were sharply reprov'd.³ All manner of work was strictly forbidden upon the great feast days also; and anyone who worked upon the day of atonement must be rooted out.⁴

Just as the seventh day of the week was holy, so every seventh year was also consecrated to Yahweh as a sabbatical year. In it the land must be left unsown and the vines unpruned. This precept is itself of ancient date, but it is melancholy to notice that whereas its observance was formerly enjoined as a matter of humanity, all such motives are now lost sight of. According to the ancient law⁵ the spontaneous produce of field and vineyard in the year of rest must be left to the poor, but now it is expressly assigned to the owner himself and his family.⁶

Going on still further in the same direction, the lawgiver now made every fiftieth year a sabbatical year by pre-emi-

¹ Numbers xv. 32—36.

² Exodus xxxv. 1—3.

³ Exodus xvi. 22—30.

⁴ Leviticus xxiii. 3, 7, 8, 28, 29, 30.

⁵ Exodus xxiii. 10, 11. Compare Vol. III., pp. 241, 242.

⁶ Leviticus xxv. 1—7.

nence.¹ This sacred year was to begin on the great day of atonement, and was called the "year of jubilee," from the name of the trumpet (jobel) by which it was consecrated. It was to be a period of freedom; the land was to lie fallow; the poverty-stricken Israelite who had sold his heritage was to receive it back again; the Jewish slave was to be restored to liberty.

This law about the year of jubilee remained a dead letter, like so many others, but is none the less indicative of the compiler's spirit. The soil of Canaan was Yahweh's possession, and they who had received it from him, and were as strangers in his inheritance, might not permanently relinquish it to others, inasmuch as it was not theirs. The lawgiver did his best to regulate the life of the people in general, and of each individual in particular, in accordance with such abstract principles as these, and whenever he had the power he would back his ordinances by force. "Whoever does otherwise shall be rooted out," he constantly declares. But by whom? Had a man like Nehemiah been in command of the requisite power, there would have been no doubt upon that point! The magistracy would have carried out the law. But fortunately for the people, the Jewish magistracy was rarely strong enough to enforce these regulations. The only course was to leave their maintenance to Yahweh.

Such are some of the principle injunctions of the Law! There were a great many more that we have not given, and their number was always on the increase. The priests issued regulations upon all conceivable subjects. The laws of inheritance,² the punishment of crime, and the customs of war³ were as much within their sphere as vows,⁴ priestly revenues, or

¹ Leviticus xxv. 8—55.

² Numbers xxvii. 1—11, xxxvi.

³ Numbers xxxi.

⁴ Leviticus xxvii.

purifications. No line was drawn between secular and spiritual matters. The whole field of life was covered as far as possible by religious laws, which had a constant tendency to run into hair-splitting frivolity. The tendency is painfully manifest in a certain chapter of Leviticus,¹ which is itself the herald of ever-increasing degeneration. It attempts to answer a difficult question by means of a fictitious narrative, which takes us back to the wanderings in the desert.

Probably the author's purpose was to explain how it came to pass that, though there were four branches of Aaronites, none but descendants of Eleazar and Ithamar were to be found amongst the priestly families. Accordingly he tells us how Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, came by their end. They had put unconsecrated fire in their censers, and were therefore struck by lightning, upon which Moses declared that Yahweh was enforcing his demand for especial reverence from those who drew near him, namely the priests. Aaron smothered his grief in reverence for Yahweh's retributive justice, and Moses ordered certain Levites to remove the bodies.

Aaron had done quite right in abstaining from loud demonstrations of grief, and his surviving sons were not allowed to bewail their brothers. Wailing did not become a priest, and whatever blows might fall upon him he must not quit the sanctuary, for he was anointed with Yahweh's oil. Then if a priest suffered a heavy loss, must he behave just as if nothing had happened? That was too much for even Moses to require, as appeared from the following circumstance: Aaron and his sons burnt a part of a sin offering which they ought by law to have eaten inside the sanctuary, and at first Moses was very angry with them for this irregularity; but when they pleaded in excuse their natural depression at the death of Nadab and Abihu, he forgave them.

¹ Leviticus x.

The conclusion reached by the lawgiver accords with our own feelings. A priest, even a high priest, need not altogether forget that he was a husband and a father. Though it would violate his consecration were he to give free play to his grief, yet when sudden deaths occurred in the bosom of his family he need not behave in all respects as if nothing had happened, and might be pardoned for violating some of the sacrificial laws. But how deadening must be the effect of a law which tells a priest how far his grief may go !

The same triviality—inevitably leading to straining out gnats and swallowing camels—may be perceived in a considerable number of laws, and becomes gradually more and more characteristic of the activity of the priests. Alas for the man who yielded implicitly to their guidance and attempted to comply with the Law in all things ! The meshes were drawn tighter and tighter until at last he could not take a single step without the Law claiming the right of dictating how he was to take it, while the constant terror of pollution embittered all his days, and the very thought of freedom had died from his heart !

CHAPTER XIX.

THE UNSUCCESSFUL OPPOSITION.

NUMBERS XVI., XVII.; ISAIAH LVI. 1–8, LXVI. 1–4, 20, 21; JONAH ;
PSALM L.

THE very thought of freedom had died !—Then did all the Israelites allow themselves to be bound hand and foot without a struggle ? Was there no one left to stand where the prophets had stood, to look down with them upon all this pomp of worship, upon all these regulations of the Law, and comprehend that Yahweh could be served by no outward shows and only required integrity and mercy from his wor-

shippers? Or if this position was too lofty for the mass of Jews, were there no hearts and minds still sound enough to hate this sharp distinction between Jews and Gentiles, or proud enough to reject the slavery of the Law? Was every Jew already steeped in the sacerdotal spirit?—Far from it! Ezra and Nehemiah had to carry their reforms in the teeth of a violent opposition; and we have already observed¹ that however strongly calculations of policy and self-seeking may have entered into the game, many of those who took part in it were actuated by nobler motives. It is well worth while to pass in review the various elements of the opposition.

We are struck to begin with by the fact that Tobiah and the rest of Nehemiah's opponents were supported by a prophetess, Noadiah, and by certain prophets also.² Sanballat, indeed, assumes that there are other members of the order prepared to proclaim the governor king, and therefore of one mind with him;³ but then again it is a prophet, Shemaiah, who endeavours to entrap him.⁴ And what is it that this Shemaiah tries to make him do? To accompany him into the temple for refuge. He could not have made such a proposition to Nehemiah with any hope of success if the law that no layman might enter the temple had already been universally recognised. The prophet evidently belonged to the laxer party, which was known to advocate the opening of the sanctuary to the laity. Had it been otherwise the trick would have been too gross.

There are other indications of a freedom which scandalised the priests. In the Second Isaiah, for instance, we read:⁵ "The heathens of distant lands shall come and shall bring your brethren, who dwell amongst them in exile, as an offering to Yahweh; luxuriously upon beasts of burden shall they bring them to Yahweh's holy mountain, as the

¹ See p. 194.² Nehemiah vi. 14.³ Nehemiah vi. 7.⁴ Nehemiah vi. 10—14.⁵ Isaiah lxvi. 20, 21.

sons of Israel bring their gifts in a clean vessel to Yahweh's house. And from them that are brought back, also, will I choose Levitical priests, says Yahweh."

This is not the only indication that there were advocates amongst the Jews of the universal priesthood of the faithful. We see it also from a story in the Pentateuch, that probably dates from Ezra's time or later.¹ It has been repeatedly retouched, and it is not always certain how much belongs to the original story and how much to the subsequent additions. The earliest portion probably contained a story of certain Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, who refused to obey the summons of Moses, and were therefore swallowed up alive by the earth. But one of the subsequent interpolators gave them two hundred and fifty distinguished men of all the tribes of Israel, as associates, who complained of the pretensions of the Levites to the exclusive exercise of sacred functions. "Are not all these holy also? Is not the whole community of Israel consecrated to Yahweh?" Upon this Moses gave them a challenge. They were all to come, each provided with a censer, to the tent of conference; Aaron was to do the same, and Yahweh would then show which of them he accepted as his priest. Hardly had the smoke of their incense begun to rise when lightning darted from the sanctuary, and the two hundred and fifty usurpers were consumed. Thereupon the priest, Eleazar, collected their golden censers, threw the unholy fire out of them, and made a covering for Yahweh's altar of them. Thus whenever the Israelites looked upon the altar they might reflect that Yahweh would not accept the service of any priests but those he had chosen. And again, when the congregation murmured at the death of their companions, and blamed Moses and Aaron for it, they had to thank the very men they reproached for not being utterly destroyed themselves by the wrath of Yahweh,

¹ Numbers xvi.

for a pestilence broke out amongst them and soon laid thousands of them low, nor did it cease to rage until Aaron had appeased Yahweh by swinging his censer before him. Who could doubt, after this, that he was the chosen priest of God?

This story marks the triumph of the Levites in their attempt to assert their exclusive right to all the functions of the temple. The universal priesthood of the people had for some time many theoretical advocates, but practically it was not easy to infringe upon the exclusive privileges of those who had been in actual possession of most of the posts about the temple from the Return onwards. Certain families whom the Levites could not expel, especially amongst the singers and porters, they adopted into their own tribe by means of fictitious genealogies;¹ other families they forced to surrender their functions whether they would or not; and at last the triumphant priestly tribe, successfully maintaining its pretensions and forgetting to how many shifts it had been reduced in securing them, saw its privileges generally recognised; and in this picture of the two hundred and fifty rebels who dared to dispute them, it could depict the fate that awaited every layman who should venture to claim the right of mediating with Yahweh.

But when the rights of Levi as against all the other tribes were firmly established, there still remained certain questions as to the respective rights of the priests and other Levites, one of which has left its mark in a second revision of the story we are now discussing.

According to this second revision the rebels who joined Dathan and Abiram were not Israelites of every tribe, but a certain section of the Levites, namely the Korahites, who were not content with their subordinate position in the sanctuary, and aimed at the priesthood. To punish them the

¹ 1 Chronicles vi. 31-47, xxvi.

earth opened at the command of Moses and swallowed them up alive.

This story points to what must have been a great question of the day when it was written. Had the powerful Levitical family of the Korahites never aimed at the priesthood, then Korah would not have been immortalised as the man who went down alive with his followers to the under-world. A later priest, who accepted the story as historical, was sadly perplexed by the fact that Korah's family not only still existed, but was held in high honour. He therefore took the liberty of making a note to the effect that Korah's children did not perish with him,¹ thereby contradicting the story itself, which expressly says that both he and his were destroyed.² Possibly the story is founded on the reminiscence of a conflict for the right to the priesthood waged in the century after Ezra between the Korahites and Aaronites, and not settled without bloodshed at last. In that case we may suppose that the Korahites had many supporters amongst the people, and that the writer of this legend thought it very necessary to put forward some telling defence of the privileges of the Aaronites.

The wider and deeper question of the relation of the whole tribe of Levi to the rest of Israel is further illustrated by another legend,³ which tells us how the Israelites murmured at the exclusive assumption of the priesthood by the Levites, whereupon Moses commanded the heads of the tribes to write the names of their respective tribes upon their staves, which he then deposited in the tent of conference. And behold! next day Levi's staff, upon which Aaron's name was written, was found in blossom, and even bearing fruit. So when Moses showed this wonder to the sons of Israel, and gave orders that Aaron's staff should be preserved as a

¹ Numbers xxvi. 11.

² Numbers xvi. 32.

³ Numbers xvii.

perpetual monument to prevent their ever murmuring again, all the non-Levites cried with one voice: "We are undone! Which of us would ever dare to draw near to Yahweh as a priest?" Such stories, like that of Uzziah's leprosy,¹ no doubt made a deep impression upon the devout public when the contest was already nearly decided in favour of the Aaronites and the tribe of Levi, and thus contributed largely towards securing to the priesthood the privileges it had once gained, and towards making the chasm between the priesthood and the laity more and more impassable. But we learn from these very stories and their denunciations of the opposing party how hard a task the priests had had in smothering the voice of freedom.

We have seen what stern measures Ezra and Nehemiah found necessary to prevent the mingling of Israel with the heathens. In this case also an exalted principle stood opposed to their policy. Many of the nobles especially may have contracted marriages with heathens from political motives, but there were many Jews who genuinely disliked the national pride of which the reformers were but too full, and who wished at any rate to smooth the way for the heathens to come over to Judaism. Such is the spirit of the following prophetic utterance.² "Thus says Yahweh: Maintain justice and do right, for my salvation is near and my righteousness shall be soon revealed. Blessed is the man who steadfastly does these things, who preserves himself from desecrating the sabbath and from all evil deeds. Let not even the stranger who joins the people of Yahweh say: 'Yahweh has shut me out; I can never belong to his people.' Let not even the eunuch say: 'I am but a dry tree!' for even they, if they keep my sabbaths and observe my covenant, shall

¹ 2 Chronicles xxvi. 16—21. Compare Vol. III., pp. 399 ff.

² Isaiah lvi. 1—8.

receive a heritage in my house and within my walls better than a heritage of children, shall receive an eternal name. And as for the strangers who join my people out of love for me and observe the sabbath, I will bring them to my holy mountain and will make them glad in my house of prayer, and their offerings upon my altar shall be acceptable to me ; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. Thus says Yahweh, who gathered Israel's scattered ones : ' I will gather far more to them yet.' "

Though this prophecy was probably written during the Captivity or shortly after it, such sentiments do not soon perish, and those who held them must have had an open eye for the virtues of heathens, must have allowed intrinsic excellence to counterbalance the stain of heathen birth. And this was really the case with many Jews. Was not Caleb the Kennizzite, whose trust in Yahweh's support had gained him an inheritance in Israel, praised for his faith ?¹ Was not the Canaanitish woman Rahab held up to admiration and her posterity included amongst the Israelites, because she had helped the people of Yahweh to conquer Canaan ?² And what is the purpose of the whole book of Ruth if not to show how the gentle Moabitess, who had come over to the people of Yahweh, was thought worthy to become the ancestress of the great king David ?³

We may learn from the book of Jonah how completely some of the Israelites had risen to the conception that Yahweh's love extended to all mankind, heathen as well as Jew. The story runs thus :—

Jonah the son of Amittai—who is known to history as a contemporary of Jeroboam II.⁴—was commanded by Yahweh to go to the great city of Nineveh and announce its fall as a punishment for its wickedness. But the prophet was

¹ See Vol. II., pp. 149 ff.

² See Vol. II., pp. 239 ff.

³ See Vol. II., pp. 131, 132.

⁴ 2 Kings xiv. 25.

very loth to obey the commandment, for he saw beforehand what would happen. Yahweh was far too merciful to carry out his threat, and he, the messenger of God, would be put to shame by the result. So he resolved upon flight, and took his passage in a ship for Tarshish, hoping thus to elude the vigilance of Yahweh. But he soon perceived the folly of this thought, for Yahweh raised a mighty storm, and the ship was in the greatest peril. In vain did the seamen pray to their several gods; in vain did they ease the ship by throwing out her freight; the fury of the storm was still increasing. As the steersman looked anxiously round his eye lighted upon Jonah, who was lying near the helm in deep sleep. Upon this he roused his careless fellow-voyager, not without indignation, and urged him to invoke his god. Now, when the fury of the storm still rose, the seamen determined at last to draw lots and find out who it was that had so offended his god as to make him pursue the vessel thus. The lot fell to Jonah, and he had to tell them who he was, whence he came, what he had done, and so forth. When he said that he was a Hebrew, that he worshipped Yahweh, creator of land and sea, and had endeavoured to evade the commandment of his mighty god, the sailors were filled with deadly terror. Now they understood the reason of this storm. Thinking that Jonah himself would be best able to direct them, they asked him what sacrifice would appease the offended god, and he answered gloomily, "Throw me into the sea! Then the storm will subside; for I know that it has risen because of me." But his companions were not so cruel as to take him at his word immediately. They did their very utmost to reach the land. All in vain! How could they hope to resist Yahweh? They did not doubt that it was he who had sent the storm, and when they perceived at last that there was nothing for it but to sacrifice Jonah, they besought Yahweh not to hold them guilty of shedding

innocent blood, and then they flung the prophet into the sea. The storm subsided instantly, and the sailors, overcome by such a proof of Yahweh's might, made sacrifices and offered vows to him.

Meanwhile, however, Jonah did not perish. A great fish had swallowed him by the ordinance of Yahweh, and in its belly he sang a song of thanksgiving for his rescue, and promised to offer up his prayers and sacrifices in the temple. Three days afterwards the fish came to the shore by Yahweh's command, and threw Jonah out uninjured.

Then Yahweh once again commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh and announce its destruction; and the prophet, having now learnt wisdom, did not resist again. Now Nineveh was an enormous city, three days' journey across. As soon as Jonah entered he began to declare that in forty days the city would be destroyed, and hardly had he preached a single day before it was evident that his words were not in vain. The Ninevites, from the oldest to the youngest, received his word as a word of God, proclaimed a fast, and put on mourning garments; and no sooner did the king hear of it than he rose from his throne, set aside his crown, his sceptre, and all his splendour, went and sat in the ashes, clad in deep mourning, and issued a proclamation commanding a general humiliation, "Let man and beast fast and be clad in sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; let everyone turn from his evil ways and cease from violence." Perhaps if they all repented thus, God might pity them and spare them. And so it was. When God saw all their doings he pitied them, and determined not to execute his threat.

But when Jonah learnt this he was full of indignation, and did not hesitate to tell Yahweh why he was displeased at the city's being forgiven. Was it not just what he had said when first he tried to escape from Yahweh's command? He knew that nothing would come of it. Yahweh was far too

merciful to destroy a great heathen city like Nineveh. And now how utterly he, the prophet, was put to shame! He only wished he could die!—To bring him to his better senses Yahweh only asked him to consider whether he did well to be angry. But Jonah did not repent. Full of bitterness, and still half hoping that his word would be made good by the result, he went to the east of the city and sat down in a meadow to see what would happen. Here, however, his god found means of bringing home to him more clearly how far astray his passion had led him. A miraculous tree shot up close to him, and grew so marvellously in a single day that the prophet already rejoiced in its shadow; but in the night a worm came and gnawed at the root of the tree so that it withered, and Jonah was once more exposed to the blazing sun, while Yahweh raised a hot east wind to make it more intolerable yet. Tortured in mind and body the unhappy seer longed again to die, and mourned over the beautiful tree that had perished in a single night. Then Yahweh spoke to him once more, and showed him the perverseness of his heart. His pity had been stirred by a tree, for the growth of which he had not toiled, which had shot up in a single night, and perished again in a single night; and should not Yahweh take pity upon the great city of Nineveh, in which there were a hundred and twenty thousand little children who could not tell their right hand from their left, and great herds of unoffending cattle?

This story is rich in meaning if taken as a poem, though senseless enough if taken as history. It shows us what was going on in many a Jewish heart and mind in the time of Ezra. What had come, people asked, of all those threats of judgment which Yahweh had made by his prophets against so many heathen places, including Babylon the chief city of his people's oppressors? The Persian kings had spared it, and it still shone forth in all its glory. Were

all these preachers, who had foretold its ruin, false prophets? Far from it! What then?—The writer of the book of Jonah answers: “Yahweh is merciful. When the heathens repent he is no longer wrath with them;” and at the same time he shows us, in the character of the sailors, how merciful the heathens sometimes are and how ready to worship Yahweh.

This is a most touching and beautiful solution of the problem by which the prophets felt more and more perplexed as time went on. As long as the belief was held that people really might receive direct revelations from the deity concerning the future, as long as every prediction must be classed either as an inspiration from Yahweh or as a lie, so long this answer was the best that could be given to the question why heathen cities, the fall of which had been proclaimed, did not really perish. But those who gave this answer, or accepted it, were no allies of Ezra’s.

Ezra and those who felt with him attached the utmost importance to the service in the temple, and Malachi considered that the neglect into which it had fallen was one of the chief causes of Yahweh’s wrath. But in his day also there were some who proclaimed the insufficiency and even the superfluity of temple services and sacrifices, and they had probably made their influence more or less distinctly felt on occasion of the rebuilding of the sanctuary on Mount Sion. It was probably at this period that a prophet uttered the following words:¹ “Thus says Yahweh: Heaven is my throne and the earth my footstool. What manner of house, then, will ye build for me, and what manner of resting place will ye prepare me? It is I myself who made all these and caused them to exist, says Yahweh. But I look upon him who is humble and contrite in heart and fears my word. Who slays an ox slays a man, who sacrifices a sheep breaks

¹ Isaiah lxvi. 1—4.

a dog's neck, who brings a meat offering to the altar makes an oblation of swine's blood, who burns incense praises in vain. If they choose their own way and delight in abominations I, too, shall choose to mock them and terrify them, because they have not answered to my voice nor hearkened to my words, but have done what is evil in my eyes, and delighted in that which I hate."

It certainly appears as if this prophet rejected the whole system of sacrifice, in the mass, and even pronounced it an abomination, but we shall probably be nearer the truth if we simply understand him as expressing disgust at the sacrifices offered by those who did not attend to Yahweh's word. In this feeling, at any rate, he did not stand alone. We find it expressed, for instance, in the following poem, which may very well date from the time of Ezra:¹

Yahweh, the god of gods, is speaking ;

He calls the whole earth together from the rising
of the sun to its setting.

Yahweh² arises from Sion, the perfection of beauty.

Let our God come nigh and keep not silence !

A consuming fire goes forth before him

And round him rages the storm.

He cries to the heaven above,

To the earth below, to judge his people.

"Collect my loved ones before me

Who have taken my covenant, confirmed by victims !"

And the heaven proclaimed his sentence ;

For Yahweh, he is judge.

"Hearken, my people, that I may speak,

And Israel, that I may tell thee, I Yahweh, who am
thy god.

¹ Psalm l. 1—15.

² Compare Vol. III., p. 249.

Not for the fewness of thy offerings shall I chastise thee ;

Thy burnt sacrifices are ever in my mind.

I will take no ox from thy house,

Nor goat from thy folds ;

For all the birds of the mountains are mine,

All that moves in the fields my possession !

Were I hungry I should not need to tell thee,

For the earth with all that is on it is mine.

Should I eat the flesh of oxen,

And drink the blood of goats ?

Offer praise unto Yahweh,

And pay the Most High your vows.

Call upon me in the day of trouble !

I will deliver you and you shall honour me."

The rest of the psalm contains Yahweh's sentence on the godless, who are threatened with destruction for their theft, adultery, lying, and deceit. In this latter portion of the poem the reformers of Ezra's century could very heartily have joined, but they would have been quite out of sympathy with the slighting manner in which the external service is spoken of in the earlier portion. It is true that in their better moments they would have admitted with the psalmist that God takes no delight in sacrifices, and that the only offering truly acceptable to him is a broken and a contrite heart,¹ but they would never have said so spontaneously, and in practice their path and that of the authors of these psalms were often widely severed.

To sum up our results, Ezra and Nehemiah were opposed not only by those who felt no interest in their people and their religion, but also by men who were guided by such noble principles that we cannot but lament the defeat of

¹ Psalm li. 16, 17. Compare Vol. III., p. 78.

their pure and true conceptions. But this defeat was at the time inevitable. In the first place, the position which these heirs of the great prophets took was far too lofty for the mass of the people to be able to rise to it; and in the second place, they were neither at one with each other nor consistent with themselves. Look again, for instance, at the beginning of the psalm just quoted, where Yahweh comes in thunder out of Sion, and where he speaks of his covenant as confirmed by the sacrifice of victims. How strangely out of keeping it is with the sequel in which he declares that he desires no sacrifices, and looks with pleasure upon the contrite heart. This internal contradiction, the result of a union of old and new conceptions, which we have noted elsewhere also,¹ is quite enough to account for the weakness of the advocates of these views as a party. If a party is to be strong, it must be clearly conscious of its aim; it must, if possible, embody it in visible forms, distinct doctrines, and definite enactments; in a word, it must adopt what we call a "programme." Ezra's party did this, but that of his opponents could not.

Observe, moreover, that the cry of freedom is always liable to be taken up by those who have no real earnestness of character, and it generally has appearances against it. Ezra's programme—the separation of Yahweh's people from the heathen; the service of the temple flourishing under the well-ordered superintendence of the priesthood; Yahweh's people a holy people;—this had the ring of an earnest purpose, and the men who supported it were sternly strict and upright. But it requires a rare amount of genuine piety permanently to maintain in all their strength such beautiful principles as that Yahweh's love extends to all men, that every believer may be a priest, that Yahweh demands nothing but a virtuous life. Freedom is apt to degenerate into

¹ See Vol. III., pp. 322 ff.

licence. Moreover, a shrewd sense of self-interest often dictated alliances with the heathen ; some of the priestly offices had good incomes attached to them ; it was cheap to neglect the temple service ;—and it is fatal to the party of progress when the profession of liberal principles becomes “ advantageous.”

Finally, we must remember that the prophets found ever-increasing difficulty in gaining recognition as messengers of Yahweh, and even in the closely connected task of genuinely believing themselves to be such. The book of Jonah shows us the difficulties with which they had to wrestle. “ Yahweh was too merciful to destroy a great city, even of heathens.” This solution was a very beautiful—evasion. The fact was that most of the prophecies launched against the heathens had simply remained unfulfilled. The discovery that Yahweh’s mercy was the cause of this does credit to the writer who made it, but its natural result must inevitably be that prophets would not care to announce a judgment upon any heathen city, or if they did they would gain no credence. Nor was this the only kind of unfulfilled prophecy. The truth of the predictions of Israel’s greatness was likewise still without proof. No wonder that the prophets lost their self-reliance, and therefore received no revelations. The consequence was that their inspiration and enthusiasm and the respect they had previously enjoyed were no longer available to strengthen their party.

Thus everything concurred to give the victory to Ezra. The opposition long maintained the contest, but had to yield at last when the bold scribe received the support of the temporal power. Those of his opponents who were wealthy in many cases left the country. The rest held their peace, or at any rate were powerless to prevent the principles upheld by Ezra from gradually sinking into the hearts of the people.

CHAPTER XX.

REJOICING IN THE LAW OF YAHWEH.

2 CHRONICLES XXIX. 25—30, XXX. 18—20; PSALMS LXXXIV.,
CXX.—CXXXIV., CXIX., XIX. 7—14.

WHEN we remember what difficulty Ezra and Nehemiah had in introducing the priestly Law, and how they smothered freedom and quenched the spirit of prophecy in the task, we might well suppose that the Jews had yielded to a stern necessity in bending under the yoke of their institutions, and that the triumph of the Law marked the commencement of a spiritual slavery which choked the religious life. But this would be a gross mistake. It is true that the supremacy of the Law was in the long run fatal to that true piety which cannot live without liberty; but the way along which mankind was led by the Law resembled many other ways that lead to destruction in being broad and smooth at first. The Law during the first centuries after its introduction was no burden to the pious, but a joy. It was a yoke, indeed, but one which they delighted in bearing.

In the first place they enjoyed the privilege of regular religious instruction, which had probably been rendered accessible even during the Captivity by the so-called synagogues or gathering places, where the teachers expounded Yahweh's commandments to all who wished to hear. Now when Ezra had begun his reformation, and had afterwards continued it by holding public meetings for the reading of the Law, under Nehemiah's protection, the custom appears to have gradually established itself, first in Jerusalem and afterwards in every place where Jews resided, of constantly meeting to offer up prayers and listen to the explanation of the Law.¹ At first the men who devoted themselves to this exposition were

¹ Compare Vol. V., pp. 178, 179.

generally Levites or priests, but gradually laymen also came forward. These interpreters were called Scribes, and gradually became a distinct order. Jerusalem was naturally the centre of their activity, but by degrees they made their light shine everywhere. What the Chronicler represents as taking place under Jehoshaphat¹ did really happen after the time of Ezra: Levites and priests travelled through the land with Yahweh's book of law to teach the people. The synagogue could never become the scene of the regular Jewish worship, and could therefore never rival the temple, to which the religious service in the stricter sense was still confined; but it provided to some extent for the religious wants of the Jews who were prevented by the length and difficulty of the journey from visiting Jerusalem more than once or so in the year, and gave to all something that they could not find in the temple service, namely instruction. The scribes, moreover, provided for the administration of justice. Here, again, the Chronicler makes Jehoshaphat² establish regular judges, and exhort them to remember that their sentence is an utterance of Yahweh, and that they must therefore act with integrity, while the supreme court at Jerusalem is to decide all doubtful points boldly and uprightly; but in attributing all this to Jehoshaphat he is really describing the state of things that was gradually realised in Judæa after the time of Ezra. The people had good cause to bless the scribes. The whole tribe of Levi, to which at first these men of the Law for the most belonged, rose higher and higher in popular estimation, and was more and more exalted.

As a matter of course, the priests were profoundly attached to the Law. It is true that it placed them, as well as others, under many restrictions, by prescribing forms with which they had to comply on all manner of occasions; but

¹ 2 Chronicles xvii. 7-9.

² 2 Chronicles xix. 5-11.

this compliance was quite easy, and was well calculated to secure them the confidence of the masses. In proportion as the people not only strictly complied with the regulations as to cleanness and uncleanness and other matters to which every Israelite had to attend, but enhanced the splendour of the temple service by the strictness with which they offered the sacrifices prescribed, in that proportion did all who were connected with the temple become devoted to every external adjunct of the service.

The extent to which this devotion sometimes went may be seen from the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, which not only resemble each other in spirit, but were probably all written by the same man, as late as the third century B.C.

We have already noticed more than once that this writer is far from a trustworthy guide for the history of the period before the Captivity; and that even in dealing with Ezra's century, he sometimes confuses different periods in such an extraordinary manner that we can only make use of his work with confidence when it is evident that he is incorporating older documents into his narrative. His work is therefore of little value, as far as ancient times are concerned; but it furnishes a precious contribution to our knowledge of his own times, inasmuch as his views of history indicate the character of his own ideals.

He was unquestionably one of the servants of the temple, and we may gather from the delight he takes in dwelling upon the arrangements of the temple music that he was probably one of the singers. Now this writer's ideal was of a truly sacerdotal type; and just as the author of the Book of Origins had described the times of Moses and Joshua as the period when Yahweh's will was perfectly obeyed, so he depicted the days of the kings who were known as pious, David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, as the golden

age of his ideal Yahweh worship, with its splendid service, its numerous priesthood and its carefully regulated choir supported by a suitable orchestra. In dealing with the history of David and his successors we have frequently glanced by anticipation at what the Chronicler says about them.¹ We may therefore be brief in our sketch of his work and the spirit which it breathes.

The opening chapters² are taken up by certain genealogies, especially of Judæan and Benjamite families and of the Levites. Amongst them is a list of the high priests from Aaron to the time of the Captivity,³ subsequently continued to the time of Alexander the Great,⁴ and also a genealogy which sets forth how David's contemporary, the great singer Heman, was descended from Levi through Samuel (whom we know to have been an Ephraimite, and not a Levite at all⁵), and also how Heman's celebrated brother artists, Asaph and Ethan (the latter probably identical with Jeduthun), belonged by descent to the priestly tribe.⁶ After devoting a few verses to Saul⁷ the writer goes on to David, the king after his own heart, to whom he devotes no fewer than nineteen chapters.⁸ These chapters contain a few short notices of David's heroes, evidently taken from trustworthy sources, very short accounts of some of the events of his reign, taken from the same authorities as those used by the books of Kings, but excluding all mention of David's conduct towards Uriah and Bathsheba, and an elaborate description of how he conveyed the ark to Jerusalem, in accordance with the prescriptions of the Law, with the assistance of the priests and Levites and a full orchestra, led by Heman, Asaph, and Jeduthun; how he consecrated a tent for it, and then regu-

¹ See Vol. III., pp. 13 f., 217 f., 221 ff., 366 f.

² 1 Chronicles i.—ix.

³ 1 Chronicles vi. 3—15.

⁴ Nehemiah xii. 10, 11.

⁵ 1 Samuel i. 1.

⁶ 1 Chronicles vi. 22—28, 31—47, xvi. 41, 42, xxv.; 2 Chronicles v. 12, xxix. 13, 14, xxxv. 15.

⁷ 1 Chronicles x.

⁸ 1 Chronicles xi.—xxix.

lated the details of the temple service by anticipation. In describing Solomon's temple the Chronicler is less detailed, but he enlarges upon some of the sacred utensils, and does not forget the choir of Levites in describing the dedication of the temple.¹ In other respects his notice of the wise and wealthy king is brief.² After mentioning the revolt of the Ten Tribes³ he almost entirely loses sight of the northern kingdom, and confines his attention to Judah and Benjamin, the tribes over whom the house of David ruled, and amongst whom—a matter of far more consequence in his eyes—Aaronites of the tribe of Levi officiated as priests.

The writer's special tendencies become most manifest when he finds a story in his authorities with a decidedly unorthodox look about it, and feels compelled to give it a more or less violent twist in order to escape the appearance of throwing a slur upon the pious men of a former period. From this point of view it is interesting to find him stating that David only sacrificed upon Araunah's threshing floor because he was too much terrified to go to the Tent of Conference;⁴ that Solomon worshipped Yahweh at the *bamah* of Gibeon because the old Mosaic tabernacle was there,⁵ and that the priest, Jehoiadah, had brought about the revolution which placed Joash upon the throne⁶ with the aid of the Levites, not that of the body-guard.

He cannot be acquitted of narrowness in these cases; but when he tells us, for example, how Hezekiah purified the temple, caused the Passover to be celebrated throughout Israel, and regulated the temple worship,⁷ he throws his whole heart into the narrative. In passing judgment upon

¹ 2 Chronicles v. 11—13, vii. 6; compare Vol. III., p. 113.

² 2 Chronicles viii., ix.

³ 2 Chronicles x.

⁴ 1 Chronicles xxi. 28—30; compare Vol. III., p. 40.

⁵ 2 Chronicles i. 3; compare p. 181.

⁶ 2 Chronicles xxiii.; compare Vol. III., p. 227.

⁷ 2 Chronicles xxix.—xxx.; compare Vol. III., pp. 366, 367.

him we must never forget that he really loved the temple service, and loved the sacred music. The necessity of being constantly on our guard against accepting his statements does not give us a pleasant impression of this man; and it is therefore all the more necessary to the formation of a fair estimate that we should remember how important an element of religion the sacred music really supplied not only to him, but to many of his countrymen also. It made a profound impression upon him and delighted his very heart to see the multitudes bowing down upon solemn occasions as soon as the orchestra began to sound the drums, the pipes, and the harps, and then when the whole choir or a soloist sang the psalms of David or Asaph, reverently bending to the earth again in sacred, festal joy.¹

His heart was in his work, and for that very reason his religious life could not be altogether choked by forms. This is evident from what he tells us of the great numbers of Israelites who joined in celebrating the Passover, to which Hezekiah had invited all the faithful, though they were not Levitically clean. He makes Hezekiah bless them with the words, "May Yahweh, who is good, accept everyone whose heart urges him to worship the god of his fathers, even if he cannot do so according to the purity of the sanctuary." "And," the writer adds, "Yahweh heard him and healed the people."² This is a remarkable story, and, just because it is an invention, it bears strong witness to the soundness of the writer's heart. It was not every Jew who would have allowed that Yahweh looks to the good intention rather than to external purity. Such a sentiment, indeed, is really against the spirit of the Law, and our writer's entertaining it shows that the deadening principles of formalism had not yet smothered his better feelings.

¹ See 2 Chronicles xxix. 25-30.

² 2 Chronicles xxx. 18-20.

This trait, however, stands almost alone, and in reading Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, we are deeply impressed with the danger incurred by anyone whose affections are so completely wrapped up in the outward splendour of worship; the danger, namely, of never getting beyond the outside, and of losing the religious life in forms.

Of course this danger threatened those who were in the temple every day more than those who only visited it occasionally. Custom generally goes far to blunt the feelings. But, on the other hand, we may see from a number of the psalms how profoundly the magnificent service of the temple impressed the ordinary Israelite; how strongly he sometimes felt that God was near when he trod the courts of the temple. Take this song, for instance :¹

How lovely are thy dwelling-places, O Yahweh of war-hosts!

My soul pants and faints for desire of Yahweh's courts,

. When body and soul cry out to the living God!
Even the bird finds a house;

The swallow a nest for her young to lie in!
And I have found² thine altars, O Yahweh of war-hosts,

My king and my God!
A blessing on the dwellers in thy house,
Who never cease to praise thee!
A blessing on him whose strength is in thee,
In whose heart is trust!³

Passing through the valley of tears⁴ they make it a place of springs;
And the autumn rains cover them with blessings.

¹ Psalm lxxxiv.

^{2 3 4} Translation uncertain.

They go on from strength to strength
Who appear before God in Sion.
O Yahweh of war-hosts, hear my prayer,
Hearken, thou god of Jacob !
Look down upon him who is our shield,
Be gracious to thine anointed !
For one day in thy courts is better than a thousand
others.
I would rather lie at the threshold of the house of
God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
For Yahweh, God, is a sun and shield ;
Yahweh gives glory and honour ;
He withholds not good from them that live uprightly.
Blessed, O Yahweh, is he whose trust is in thee !

Unfortunately there are several points of great obscurity in this psalm. It is not clear, for instance, whom the writer means by "Yahweh's anointed." The expression is usually applied to the king of Israel, but there is no reason why it should not be used of the high priest also, who is called the "anointed priest."¹ This is probably the meaning here. The poem shows us how its author envied the priests. He would rather be a Levite of the lowest rank, and watch at the threshold of the temple, than enjoy the utmost luxury elsewhere ! Such sentiments may have been uttered in a moment of enthusiasm, but they reflect more or less faithfully the genuine feelings of many a heart. The pious Jew found in the temple the goal of his aspirations, the sacred spot where pure and elevated feelings streamed through his soul, where the blessing of his god came down upon him, and he was thrilled with sacred joy. A Passover or Feast of Tabernacles was in truth a day of joy to him, in which he rose into a higher and purer atmosphere, to which he looked forward with longing, and upon which he looked gratefully back.

¹ Leviticus iv. 3, 5, 16, vi. 22, and elsewhere.

This song would have been well suited for singing by the Jews on their yearly pilgrimage to the temple, both on the journey, and still more on their entry into the city; and we find other songs in the book of Psalms which are not only highly appropriate to such occasions, but were probably distinctly set aside, if not composed, for them. We still possess a collection of fifteen poems,¹ most of them short, each of which bears the inscription, "a song of *Hammaäloth*," that is, a song of "the goings up" or pilgrimages. A few of these we have already given,² and will now add a few more.

And first let us take the following cry of thankfulness:³

If there had not been Yahweh upon our side—
 So let Israel declare—
 If there had not been Yahweh upon our side
 When men rose up against us,
 Then they had swallowed us up alive,
 When their wrath was hot against us;
 Then had the waters flowed over us,
 The torrent had overwhelmed us;
 Yes! then had we been overwhelmed
 By the dire floods of water.
 Blessed be Yahweh who gave us not up
 As a prey to their teeth!
 Our life is like a bird escaped from the fowler's snare;
 The snare is broken and we have escaped.
 Our help is in the name of Yahweh,
 The creator of heaven and earth.

The following poem⁴ likewise celebrates the redeeming love of Yahweh, and is as simple in its poetical conception but as warm in its religious feeling as the other:—

They who trust in Yahweh are like Mount Sion,
 Which trembles not, but abides for ever.

¹ Psalms cxx.—cxxxiv.

² See pp. 202, 203, and Vol. I., p. 65.

³ Psalm cxxiv.

⁴ Psalm cxxv.

As mountains surround Jerusalem,
 So Yahweh encamps around his people,
 Henceforth to eternity.
 For the rule of the godless shall not endure over the
 heritage of the righteous,
 Lest the righteous put out his hands to iniquity.
 Do good, O Yahweh, to the pious ones,
 And to the upright in heart !
 But as for them who pervert their ways,
 May Yahweh lead them on the path of ill-doers !
 A blessing upon Israel !

Very varied feelings are reflected in these songs. While one gives utterance to high-wrought joy, another is inspired by deep grief ; and though a grateful recollection of the return from Babylonja rings through them all, it is but too evident that Israel's present is far from bright in all respects. Read the following psalm, for instance :¹

When Yahweh restored the fortunes of Sion,
 We were like them that dream.
 For our mouth was filled with laughter
 And our lips with joy,
 As they said amongst the heathen :
 "Yahweh has done great things for them !"
 Yes ! Yahweh has done great things for us !
 And we rejoiced.
 O Yahweh, restore our fortunes once more,
 Like streams in the south !
 They that sow in tears
 Shall reap in joy.
 He that goes forth weeping with his handful of seed
 corn
 Shall come back rejoicing, bearing his sheaves !

¹ Psalm cxxvi.

The reference to the streams in the south country depends upon the suddenness with which dry river-beds are filled with water when the rainy season comes in southern Judah.

In the next psalm which we shall give¹ the poet cries in one breath for deliverance and forgiveness; and properly to understand this prayer we must remember that every kind of misery was regarded as the punishment of sin; and therefore on the one hand confession of guilt and repentance appeared the surest way to deliverance from temporal suffering, and on the other hand every respite from trouble was hailed as a sign of Yahweh's forgiveness.

From the depths do I cry unto thee, O Yahweh!

O Lord, hearken to my voice!

Let thine ears attend to my wailing!

Yahweh! if thou didst remember transgressions,

O Lord, who then could exist?

But with thee is forgiveness

That thou mayest be honoured.

I have waited upon Yahweh,

My soul has waited, I have hoped in his promise.

My soul waits on the Lord more than they that wait
for the morning.

Aye! more than they that wait for the morning.

Let Israel hope in Yahweh, for mercy is with him;

Many are his ways of deliverance.

He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

The leading thought of Psalm cxxxiii. has made it one of the best known and most loved in the whole book.

Behold how beautiful and good

Is the dwelling together of brothers!

¹ Psalm cxxx.

Like the precious ointment on the head
 That drops down upon the beard,
 The beard of Aaron, and flows down to the fringe
 of his garment.
 Like the dew of Hermon
 Is the dew that falls on the mountains of Sion;¹
 For there does Yahweh send the blessing
 Of life for evermore.

What Aaron has to do with the matter is not obvious, though the metaphor of the oil, that joins the hair of the head in brotherly union with that of the beard, is clear enough. Perhaps the opening lines are an elaboration—more pious than poetical—of the proverb, “The dwelling together of brothers is good, like oil poured out on the head and dropping upon the beard.”

The little collection is closed by the following exhortation to the servants of the temple :²

Praise Yahweh, all ye who honour Yahweh,
 And serve in the temple of Yahweh by night !
 Lift up your hands to the sanctuary,
 And praise ye Yahweh !
 May Yahweh bless you from Sion,
 Even he who made heaven and earth !

We need not multiply proofs that the public service in the temple at Jerusalem was dear to the heart of the pious Jew. And it follows, from the nature of the case, that the more faithfully the people joined the pilgrimages to the sanctuary, the more strictly they paid their tithes and other prescribed contributions, and the more liberally they brought their freewill offerings to Yahweh, the more magnificent would the service become, and the higher would their delight in it rise in consequence. But precepts concerning the temple service

¹ Translation uncertain.

² Psalm cxxxiv.

only formed a portion of the contents of the Law, and we might well believe that Israelites who were transported with delight at the festivals and sacrifices, nevertheless groaned under the yoke of the prescriptions as to the sabbath and as to cleanness. And this was doubtless not unfrequently the case, for many of these ordinances were vexatious in the extreme; but, on the whole, the devout Jews were deeply attached to the whole Law.

This is obvious from the glowing panegyrics passed upon it in many of the psalms, amongst which the hundred and nineteenth deserves to be mentioned first on account of its great length. It is divided into twenty-two stanzas of eight verses or sixteen lines each, and is occupied chiefly with blessings upon those who observe the commands of Yahweh, and prayers for the better knowledge of his Law. It is an alphabetical poem, of monotonous style and quite deficient in poetic fire, but instinct throughout with devotion to the Law. The following stanza may serve as a specimen. In the original every line of it begins with the letter *B*.¹

Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way,
And abide in it, after thy word ?
With my whole heart have I sought after thee,
Let me not wander from thy commandments !
I have searched thy word with my heart,
That I might not sin against thee.
Blessed be thou, O Yahweh !
Teach me to honour thy precepts.
With my lips will I declare
Every utterance of thy mouth.
In the way of thy testimony I rejoice,
More than in greatest wealth.
Let me ponder on thy commandments,
And regard the path which thou hast prescribed.

¹ *Ps.* 9-16.

In thy statutes I will take delight,
And never forget thy paths.

The glory of the Law is celebrated in a far more poetic strain in some lines¹ which have been added to an older poem, of which we have already given the opening:²

The law of Yahweh is perfect, restoring the soul ;
The testimony of Yahweh is sure, making the
simple wise ;
The statutes of Yahweh are right, rejoicing the heart ;
The law of Yahweh is pure, enlightening the eyes ;
The fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring for ever ;
The commands of Yahweh are true, and righteous
altogether.

More desirable are they than gold, and much precious
metal ;

Sweeter than honey or honey-comb.
And by them is thy servant enlightened ;
In keeping them there is great reward.
But as for errors, who can mark them ?

Cleanse me from sins that I myself know not,
And preserve thy servant from the presumptuous,
That they may not have power over me !

Then shall I be found innocent
And free from gross transgressions.

May the words of my mouth be acceptable to thee,
And ever remember the thoughts of my heart,
O Yahweh, my rock and redeemer !

There is something strange in the sudden transition from the praises of the Law and the poet's thankfulness that he is privileged to know it, to this prayer for deliverance from the power of the presumptuous ; but it is explained by the melancholy circumstances of the Jews and the current ex-

¹ Psalm xix. 7-14.

² Vol. III., p. 414.

planation of their sufferings. Israel's fall was attributed to the sins of the fathers, but the delay of the promised glory was due to the uncleanness which still polluted Yahweh's people. They were indeed doing their best to walk in holiness now, but they were constantly made unclean without intending it. Alas for all these sins which they did not so much as know !

This cry already foreshadows the constant terror of pollution by which the Jews of later ages were haunted and tortured, which drove the Essenes into the wilderness,¹ and made the very "plagues of the Pharisees" endurable ! But as yet this terror only casts its shadow now and then over the joy of the pious Jew in his possession of the Law. To the question what privilege the Jew had over the heathen Paul answered,² "Especially this, that to him were the words of God entrusted," and in so saying he expressed a universal sentiment. In former times the Israelites had traced the special manifestation of God's goodness in his revealing his will by means of the prophets, but now the written word had completely taken the place of the living revelation.

No wonder that the Jews exalted the supremacy of the Law ; for under it their religion was, for a time, richer and deeper than ever. The book of Psalms is the unanswerable proof of it. We have already made many extracts from this collection, but will now glance at it as a whole. It is well worthy of our attention, for there is not another book in the Old Testament that has so rich a history. No other collection of religious poetry in the world has ever exercised so deep an influence, consoled so many sufferers, given strength for so many in conflicts, and given words to the inmost thoughts of so many pious hearts. The psalms owe their popularity more especially to the fact that they generally give utterance

¹ See Vol. V., p. 127.

² Romans iii. 1, 2.

to purely personal feelings, which is seldom the case with the prophets. However devout the latter may have been in their own personal lives, their recorded thoughts refer for the most part to their people. They were conscious above everything of being members of Israel. They were oppressed by Israel's sins; they rejoiced in Israel's conversion; saw a vision of terror in Israel's fall; and found their ideal in Israel's glory in the Messianic age. This was very noble; for to live for others is an important element of true religion. But it is not the whole of it. The sense of a personal relationship to God, with all that it involves, sorrow for personal sins, joy in the victory over personal temptation, the hope of triumph in the inner contest and of eternal life,—all this must supplement the love of others if man is to be all he should be; and in all this the psalmists on the whole excel the prophets.

Before touching upon a few details, let us glance at the general composition of the book of Psalms. It is called in Hebrew the "book of the songs of praise," and consists of a hundred and fifty poems, though in some cases what was originally one is split up into two;¹ and, in others, two originally distinct ones are joined together;² and, again, there are instances of the same psalm occurring twice with slight variations.³ These songs are divided into five books or collections, the first four of which are closed with cries of praise to God.⁴ We must not suppose that these divisions were made after the whole collection was completed, for some of the books, and especially the first, existed separately at first, and they were only united together gradually. The object of

¹ For instance, Psalms xlii. and xliii.; compare p. 43. So also Psalms ix. and x.

² For instance, Psalm xix.; compare Vol. III., p. 414, with p. 268 of this volume. So also Psalm xxiv.

³ Psalms xiv. and liii., compare p. 89. So also Psalms lx. and cviii.

⁴ See Psalms xli. 13, lxxii. 18, 19, lxxxix. 52, cvi. 48.

the collector was evidently to furnish the choir of Levites at the temple with a hymn book. With this object he provided many of the poems with musical notes which are, unfortunately, almost wholly unintelligible to us. Probably the word *selah*, which constantly recurs,¹ means that the full orchestra was to join in at the point indicated, and the choir to change; while the note rendered in our Authorised Version "for the chief singer," which frequently appears at the beginning of psalms,² indicates that the song is to be performed by a soloist. Other expressions, such as "to the *neginoth*," "to the *gittith*,"³ perhaps refer to well known tunes to which the psalms in question might be sung.

Numbers of questions as to the origin of the book of Psalms are still unanswered, but one thing is certain, namely that it was the hymn book of the second temple. Most if not all of the superscriptions which profess to give the authors of the psalms are spurious. They attribute no fewer than seventy-three to David, but we cannot place the smallest value on the testimony; and, indeed, most of the poems in question are of decidedly late origin. No doubt there are psalms which date at all events from before the Captivity, but the composition of the greater number, and certainly the collection of the whole and the introduction of them into the temple service, are subsequent to Ezra. Even those psalms which the Jews did not compose under the supremacy of the Law they adopted under its influence, and they are therefore such as could wake a responsive echo in the hearts of the servants of the Law. In these songs they recognised their own emotions, and found that they could sympathise with the poets in their prayers and lamentations, their joy and gratitude, and alas! the curses they launched

¹ For instance, in Psalm iii. 2, 4, 8.

² For instance, in Psalms iv., v., vi., viii.

³ For instance, in Psalms iv., vi., viii.

against the enemies of God, and their self-exalting pride in their own good deeds and purity.

We must not overlook this darker side of the religious life of the Jews. In their very hymns and prayers they could utter the bitterest curses,¹ and often couple with them offensive self-laudation, as we saw in the case of Nehemiah.²

Utter sentence upon me, O Yahweh, for my ways are perfect,

And my trust is unshaken in Yahweh.

Test me, O Yahweh, put me to the proof,

Examine my heart and soul.

For I never forget thy favour,

And walk in thy faithfulness without ceasing.³

A hymn composed in such a strain—and it is sustained throughout—can give us no satisfaction. And this is not the only one of its kind. This self-righteousness, however, and the closely connected bitterness against sinners and heathens, are in many instances no more than dark spots on a beautiful whole. Deep veneration for the majesty of God, intensest gratitude for all his benefits, a mighty trust in his redeeming power, a firm faith in his fidelity unshaken by the sharpest suffering, a deep sense of guilt leading to the confession that God's chastisements are justified, and a living hope in his forgiveness,—such are the emotions with which many of the psalms are filled; and side by side with the praises of the Law stand those other songs pervaded by anything but the spirit of externality, breathing of God's pleasure in a contrite heart, and loudly proclaiming the insufficiency of the whole system of sacrificial worship. The pious Jews did not perceive the intimate contradiction between the two, for the Law had not yet choked their religious life. On the contrary, it flourished under it more richly than ever.

¹ See Vol. III., pp. 410, 411, and p. 88 of this volume.

² See pp. 208, 209.

³ Psalm xxvi. 1-3.

The two centuries that succeed the introduction of the Law transcend all others in warmth and genuineness of piety. Before them the principles of the religion of Israel had not yet been sufficiently grasped by the masses of the people, and afterwards they were gradually petrified until men no longer rejoiced in the Law of Yahweh, but groaned beneath the weight of its yoke.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE JEWS UNDER GREEK SUPREMACY.

DANIEL VIII.; ESTHER; ECCLESIASTES; PSALM XLIV.

“**I** WAS once in a vision on the banks of the Ulai, and there I saw a ram with two horns of unequal length, the longest of which had grown up last. Now, this ram butted violently to the West and the North and the South, so that none of the beasts could stand before him, and he followed his own will and grasped at power. But, as I was looking, there came a goat with one great, terrific horn, storming from the West, and he fell upon the ram and vanquished him, and broke both his horns and trampled him under foot. Then this goat grew exceeding strong; but when he was mighty beyond measure his great horn was broken off and there came up four strong horns instead, pointing to the four quarters of heaven. Then there came up a horn out of one of these four, which was small at first, but afterwards grew mightily and turned towards the South and the East and towards the holy land. This horn grew up as high as heaven, and hurled down some of the stars from heaven and trampled them under foot, and even exalted himself against the Prince of the stars, put a stop to his daily sacrifice, and devastated his sanctuary. He poured contempt upon the true religion, and his work of sacrilege succeeded but too

well."¹ So we read in the book of Daniel, which we shall examine in the next chapter. The author himself explains the meaning of the vision :² The ram with the two unequal horns is the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. The hairy goat is Greece, or rather Macedonia ; the great horn is Alexander the Great ; the shooting up of the four horns in the place of the one is the division of Alexander's kingdom into four ; but all this is simply touched upon, and the horn that was small at first and then became great and defied the God of heaven, finally occupies the whole scene. This horn is a king, bold and crafty, powerful and impious, who practices unheard of atrocities with unparalleled success, conquers princes, oppresses the holy people, waxes still prouder and prouder, rebels against God himself,—until at last he is crushed by the Supreme Power. This king can only be Antiochus IV., surnamed Epiphanes, the king of Syria.

Such is a bare outline of the history of the Jews, and with the exception of a few allusions in another part of the book of Daniel,³ it is all that the Bible has to tell us of the people's fortunes from the time of Nehemiah to the middle of the second century B.C. Judæa fell, with the rest of the Persian kingdom, into the hands of Alexander the Great (332 B.C.). After his death it was passed backwards and forwards between the Egyptian and Syrian princes, and was fiercely torn by wars and dissensions until at last it was definitely incorporated with the Syrian kingdom, and enjoyed a season of repose (203 B.C.). The whole period in which Judæa was a Grecian province furnished an unfavourable contrast to that in which the Persians had ruled it ; for whereas the religious usages of the Persians had had a great attraction for the pious Jews, the customs of the Greeks were strange and hateful to them. But their actual martyrdom only began (167 B.C.) when Antiochus IV. laid waste the synagogues,

¹ Daniel viii. 2—12.

² Vv. 13—25.

³ Daniel xi.

erected the "abominable sin" of an altar to Jupiter in the court of the temple, compelled the Jews to work on the sabbath and to eat pork; in a word, attempted to abolish their religion by force. To this period of martyrdom an end was only put by the heroic insurrection of the Maccabees, followed by a desperate war.

But we must pass over all the events of this period in silence, since they are not touched on in the Bible, and confine our attention to what we know of the religion of the Jews during these centuries, and to a few remarkable products of their literary activity.

The main features of this survey have already been presented in the last chapter. For what we have said of the activity of the priests and scribes, and the deep religious life of the Jews, applies especially to the period we are now discussing, for it was after the fall of the Persian monarchy, and not before it, that the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah were written and many of the psalms composed. All we have now to do is to fill in the sketch.

In the first place we must note that with all their reverence for the written word, the priests and scribes were by no means slaves to the precise form in which they had received it. Indeed this was hardly possible as long as there was no official list of the books to be regarded as sacred writings and each one had to make his own selection, rejecting one and accepting another. In fact the scribes still took considerable liberties with the written Law, and continued to incorporate many fresh regulations in it as to public worship and other matters. There is one rather long section of the Pentateuch which was not written till after Alexander the Great.¹ And again, both now and at a still later period, alterations were made in the text here and there to avoid scandal.²

¹ Exodus xxxv.—xl.

² Compare Vol. II., pp. 195 f.

Nor did the religion of the people remain stationary; for the simple reason that it was not dead. Opinions changed and developed; one conception came to the front while another sank into the background; new customs came into fashion and old ones fell into disuse.

A profound influence was exercised upon the religion of the Jews by that of the Persians. Yahweh had always been thought of as surrounded by angels; but it was under Persian influences that an elaborate system of angelology arose, in which the angels were divided into orders, their princes, the archangels, had names given them, Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and so on, and special tasks were assigned them as guardians of peoples or individuals.—Again, according to the ancient doctrine, Yahweh made everything, both good and evil, but now the Persian doctrine of two gods made its influence powerfully felt. The Second Isaiah evidently saw the growing influence of the conception that Yahweh, like the Persian Ahuramazda, created only what was good, and he opposed it in the words,¹ “I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I, Yahweh, and no other.” But his opposition was in vain. Gradually Satan, as the author of all evil, was established by the side of the Lord of war-hosts. Thus when the Chronicler read in his old authorities that Yahweh urged David to number his people, in order that he might have a reason for chastising them,² he substituted the statement that it was Satan who rose up against Israel and urged David to take the census.³—In the third place, though the Jews did not borrow the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead from the Persians, yet it was under the influence of their beliefs that it made its way amongst them.”⁴

It cannot surprise us, however, that the scribes themselves

¹ Isaiah xlv. 7.

² 2 Samuel xxiv. 1.

³ 1 Chronicles xxi. 1; compare Vol. III., p. 40.

⁴ Compare pp. 77, 78, Vol. VI., chapter xxx.

always imagined that they were clinging exclusively to the doctrine of the fathers, and that, like the prophets and priests of a former age, they would sanction no fresh usages unless they had previously received the stamp of orthodoxy. Just as Ezra and his contemporaries incorporated many heathen usages into the Law, as though they were direct precepts of Yahweh and in perfect harmony with his worship, so now heathen usages could easily make their way in the Jewish system, if only they could furnish themselves with orthodox explanations.

A striking example of this process is furnished by the introduction, or rather the legalisation of the feast of Purim, by means of the book of Esther. The contents of this book are something as follows :—

There was a great feast at the court of Ahasuerus, the mighty king of the Persians, who ruled over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces. The splendour of the palace was dazzling, and the luxury of the feast ravished the senses. After seven days, the intoxicated monarch thought he should like to display his queen Vashti amongst his other glories, for she was transcendently beautiful. But she refused to come at his command, upon which he degraded her from the throne at the advice of his nobles, who were afraid of their own wives imitating the queen and refusing to obey them. Some time afterwards Vashti's place was taken by Esther, a Jewish orphan brought up in the house of her uncle, Mordicai, who came into the court of the palace every day from the time of his niece's exaltation onwards. Esther fully deserved the high honour she had received by her extreme docility, for she not only won the heart of the chief ruler of the harem by allowing herself to be absolutely guided by him in the selection of her adornments, but even when she wore the queenly crown was just as submissive to her uncle as she had been

when an inmate of his house. At his command she concealed her nationality.

After Esther's promotion, Mordicai did the king a great service, for he discovered that two of the chamberlains were plotting against his life, and told him their names, through Esther. Their guilt was evident, and they were put to death; but the king forgot to reward Mordicai, though Esther had not neglected to tell him the name of the man to whom he owed his life.

Mordicai, therefore, remained without any special distinction, but another of the king's subjects rose from one step of honour to another. This was a certain Haman; and since he was such a favourite of the king's, everybody cringed before him, except Mordicai, who was so proud that in spite of repeated warnings he refused to fall down upon the earth before Haman as he entered or quitted the palace. When Haman's attention was called to this he was excessively angry, and, not satisfied with simply planning the death of so insignificant an offender, he determined to compass the destruction of all his countrymen, the Jews. To do this he would need the king's consent; but he had no difficulty in obtaining it when he promised to pay ten thousand talents into the royal treasury out of the confiscated goods of these Jews. The only question left to decide was the date for the massacre. Haman decided the question by lot, and was thus led to fix the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. Accordingly, the order to massacre and plunder the Jews in the king's name was openly promulgated just eleven months in advance!

No sooner was it published than a cry of terror rose from the Jews in every portion of the kingdom, as they fasted in sackcloth and ashes. Mordicai also appeared in mourning at some distance from the palace; and when Esther sent a messenger to ask the cause of his sorrow he told her of the

king's decree, and at the same time commanded her to entreat her husband's grace on behalf of her own and her uncle's people. Obedient as she had always been before Esther now pleaded that it was death to approach the king uninvited; but Mordicai still insisted, and reminded her that she herself, as a Jewess, was involved in the common danger. Besides, he said, it was perhaps a dispensation that she had been made queen just in time to save her people. On receiving this answer she sent to beg him to fast with her three days, and promised to make the venture.

She was successful. The king graciously extended her the golden sceptre as a sign of favour, and asked her what she desired, whereupon she invited him to come with his favourite Haman to feast with her. What an honour for Haman! As they sat at wine, the king asked Esther to declare her request, and promised to grant it though it should be half his kingdom. But apparently she could not bring herself to make it, and begged the king to come and feast with her again next day,—and to bring Haman with him. The extraordinary honour shown to his favourite may have begun to surprise the king, but Haman himself was intoxicated with vanity as he went out. Picture his rage at seeing that detestable Jew at the gate of the palace again, refusing to bow to him! He went home and expatiated to his wife, his relatives, and his retainers upon all the wealth and honour he enjoyed, culminating in the renewed invitation to feast with the king and queen. "But yet," he added, "it is all nothing as long as that Jew Mordicai sits at the gate of the palace!" "Then build a gallows fifty cubits high, and hang him on it!" cried his friends. Haman thought it a capital suggestion, and the gallows soon reared its threatening form!

But mark what now took place! That night the king could not sleep, and he ordered some one to read the royal archives to him. When they came to the conspiracy that

Mordicai had discovered the king asked whether any reward had been given him, and his servants answered, No. Meanwhile the morning had come, and Haman was already in the palace to ask the king's permission to hang Mordicai. The monarch sent for him, and asked him what ought to be done to the man whom the king desired to honour above all others. Thinking that this could only mean himself, Haman declared that the man should be clad in the royal garments and seated on the king's favourite horse, with his crown upon his head, and that he should then ride through the city, preceded by one of the grandees of the kingdom crying out, "This is the man whom the king delights to honour!" Then the king, to Haman's utter dismay, replied, "Go instantly and do all this to Mordicai, the Jew!" There was no resisting the command, and Haman at once obeyed. When all was over he returned in grief and shame to his house, and told his wife and friends what had happened, to their great consternation. Full of gloomy forebodings they gave him but cold comfort as to the future,—but at that very moment a messenger came to conduct him to the queen's feast!

Again king Ahasuerus asked the queen, as they sat at wine, what it was she desired, and she cried in deep emotion, "It is my own life, O king, and the lives of my people! There is a man who is bent on slaying us all." "Who is he?" asked the half intoxicated king, and when she said it was Haman, he started up in a fury, and went out and paced up and down in the garden. Then Haman saw that his life was in danger, and fell upon the queen's divan to implore for grace. But this only served to hasten his fate, for the king was offended at his coming so near the person of the queen. The keepers of the harem, too, who cringed before the mighty favourite a moment before, were now anxious to curry favour with the king in his fall, and one of them ven-

tured to suggest that a gallows erected for Mordicai's benefit was standing in front of Haman's house! The hint was quite enough. In a few moments Haman was hanging on his own gallows at the king's command.

Mordicai was soon installed in the fallen noble's place, and the relations of the Jews to their persecutors were now completely reversed. Since every law of the Persians and Medes was irrevocable, the royal decree already issued remained in force, but a second was now universally promulgated, giving the Jews permission to defend themselves and even to attack and plunder their enemies on the day appointed for their massacre. What rejoicings there were amongst the Jews! Feast succeeded feast, and when the day they had formerly dreaded so much at last arrived, they took ample advantage of the permission granted by the king. In Susa alone they slew five hundred of their foes, including the ten sons of Haman, but they took no plunder. Not yet satisfied with their revenge, Mordicai and Esther begged that the bodies of Haman's sons might be hung upon the gallows, and that one more day might be granted to the Jews for the slaughter of their enemies. The king consented, and again three hundred victims fell in Susa alone, and seventy-five thousand in the whole kingdom. But no plunder was taken anywhere.

In memory of this deliverance Mordicai instituted a yearly feast on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, the twelfth month, and called these days *Purim* after the Persian word *pur*, or "lot," because Haman had fixed the day for the massacre of the Jews by lot. Mordicai continued to be the first minister of king Ahasuerus.

The story is a tissue of glaring impossibilities from first to last; nor can the derivation of the name of the *Purim* feast, upon which it all turns, be accepted as correct. Imagine a king consenting, at his minister's instigation, to put thou-

sands of his peaceable subjects to death, and the minister determining by lot the day upon which this colossal massacre is to take place, and then giving eleven months public notice of his intention to everyone, including his intended victims, who are nevertheless so powerful that, when permitted to do so by the king, they are able to slaughter seventy-five thousand Persians in two days. If the king had withheld his permission, would they have allowed themselves to be slaughtered like so many sheep? And, not to multiply instances, would the Jews have named the feast of their deliverance after the incidental use of the lot? The whole book is probably a fiction from beginning to end, and we should not even be justified in inferring from it that king Ahasuerus (that is Xerxes) was hostile to the Jews. What the name of Purim really signifies, and what was the true origin of the feast, we cannot tell with certainty. Possibly it was a Persian feast at which festivities were held and presents interchanged. In that case the Jews who lived amongst the Persians adopted it from their neighbours, and the writer of the book of Esther desired to find a place for it in the Jewish religion by the explanation he gave of its origin. He was completely successful. The days of Purim or of Mordicai have been observed as a festival down to the present day.

The book of Esther is inspired by a thoroughly bad spirit of intolerance, national pride, and vengefulness. In the whole work there is but one touch of a more generous feeling, but one little point of light in the darkness of the great picture, and that is the statement that the exasperated and murderous Jews never laid their hands upon any plunder, and thereby showed that it was not the base lust of wealth, but the rather less base lust of vengeance which urged them on. The heart of the man who could write such a story must have been filled with ugly passions, and it is far from creditable to the

Jews that they should have accepted the book and finally recognised it as a sacred writing. But we cannot be surprised at their doing so, since they considered hatred of the foes of Israel and his god a merit rather than a fault.

The evil spirits of vengeance and arrogance possessed the most zealous Jews far more strongly under Greek than under Persian supremacy. And this is why we have dealt with the book of Esther in this connection. Though it professes to place us under the Persian king Xerxes, it really dates from the time when zealous Jews sighed under the Greek princes who succeeded Alexander the Great. After the incorporation of Judæa in that monarch's kingdom, circumstances stimulated a violent opposition to heathen influences, and consequently to the heathens themselves, on the part of the more zealous Jews. As foreign manners began to exercise a growing fascination on the Jews, and the special Jewish character incurred ever greater danger of being lost, the champions of Jewish nationality, amongst whom the author of Esther must be reckoned, redoubled their efforts to preserve it.

There was certainly good cause for alarm, since the Greek spirit was making itself powerfully felt in Judæa. Many of the Jews were dissatisfied with the path their people were taking in matters of religion; and while many rejoiced in the Law and the service of the temple, others were tortured with doubts as to the truth of the religious philosophy of life which still prevailed around them.

Profound and serious doubts, as to the truth of the doctrine handed down from the fathers, are generally to be found in but few hearts. Most men are too superficial to entertain them.¹ But the book of Ecclesiastes shows that there were at any rate some Jews in the Grecian period who

¹ Compare p. 172.

not only felt these doubts, but were almost rent asunder by them. We will now examine this work.

It begins as follows: "Words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." But the writer has not the least intention of really passing himself off as Solomon. He says expressly:¹ "I, the preacher, *was* king of Israel," as if he were bringing the shade of Solomon upon the stage. He simply puts his own thoughts into the mouth of Solomon, whom he presents under the name of the Preacher, or rather "the Preacheress," that is to say, Wisdom.

The book has often given offence both in ancient and modern times. And no wonder. Like the book of Job, it is the fruit of deep-rooted doubts as to the government of God, but it lacks the solemn though highly unsatisfactory solution of the problem which we find in Job.

"Vanity of vanities! everything is vanity!" Such are the words in which the preacher begins to unbosom himself. Man, he goes on to say, gains nothing from all his toil; nature repeats the old round with wearisome monotony, and there is nothing new under the sun! The preacher took delight in seeking wisdom, but even that is a bootless endeavour. Indulgence of the senses—is vanity. The rich man's life—is vanity. The pursuit of knowledge—well, wisdom is better than folly, but when all is said and done the wise man and the fool both die, and there is the end of it! Life is misery. One thing succeeds another, and people choose to call this succession "good," but who knows why? Enjoy what you can get, and trouble yourself about nothing else! For injustice is triumphant, and the end of a man is like that of a beast. Death is better than life, for life is full of misery,—and yet after all a living dog is better than a dead lion, for the living do know that they will die, but the dead know nothing at all! We must submit to God. What

¹ Ecclesiastes i. 12.

else can we do? It is best to be prudent and to fear God, and if a man can enjoy his wealth with an easy heart so much the better. There are strange things to be seen under the sun—for instance, a righteous man destroyed by his goodness, and a scoundrel made prosperous by his villany. You should not aim at being too good and wise, or you will only undo yourself. Yet take care also not to be too stupid and wicked, for that is generally no less fatal. But, in fact, there are not many people of understanding, not one man in a thousand—and no women at all. Everything in the world is vanity, for what is the end of it? Death! And the dead know nothing and are forgotten, with all their love and hate. So there is nothing better to do than to enjoy life. Time and chance rule all things. If we do any good we get no thanks for it. Live with as little care as you may. After all, things often turn out better than one would think. Young man! enjoy your life, and forget not that God will judge you by your deeds. Remember this: old age with all its plagues is before you, and then death. Vanity of vanities!—In conclusion: Do not be for ever writing books, for it is weariness of the spirit; and keep God's commandments!

These specimens will suffice to characterise the spirit and tendency of the book. Not only is it full of doubt, but it offers no solution whatever of the riddles of life—not even the sublime though comfortless dictum of the book of Job, "God is great and we comprehend him not!" Here, too, God is great, but he is so great and so far off that man can feel no affection towards him; and the outcome of the whole work is simply this: "On the whole it is best to enjoy life, but to do so in moderation."

Such men as the writer of Ecclesiastes and those who agreed with him could hardly feel much enthusiasm for the Law and public worship. No doubt they duly made their sacrifices, observed the ordinary laws of purity, complied—though

not very scrupulously—with the dietary laws, and kept the sabbath decently; but at the same time they could see what was good in the heathens, like the sages of old, and did not exalt Jewish peculiarities above everything else. Thus their sceptical spirit and gloomy views of life strengthened the free-thinking party that asked for theatres and Greek works of art, and longed to study foreign languages and read the books of the heathens.

Who knows what might have become of Judaism had not Antiochus Epiphanes, by persecuting the zealots for the Law, compelled them to concentrate all their strength in the attempt to rescue their religion.

Some of the psalms which were composed at this period reflect the sufferings of the devout Jews when their enemies raged in the gathering places of God (that is to say the synagogues), broke everything in them to pieces, and then set them on fire; when, above all, the great sanctuary, the place where the Lord's name was established, was desecrated by idolatrous practices,¹ and when the Syrians blasphemed the name of Yahweh and oppressed his servants.² Alas! they thought with longing of the times when their god had rescued their forefathers and expelled the heathens.³ Ah! he had done mighty deeds in those days, for it was not the sword of the warriors but the arm of God that had made them the heirs of Canaan. And he would surely help them now again! They would not trust in sword and bow, but in Him alone. In Him they still would boast. . . . But alas! they cried, they were put to shame; their god did not support them; they were scattered abroad and sold into the hand of the enemy. There they stood in confusion of face, although they had not forgotten their god, but had remained true to Him!

¹ Psalm lxxiv. 4—8.

² *Vr.* 10, 18—23.

³ Psalm xliv.

If we had forgotten the name of our God
 Or stretched out our hands to a strange god—
 Would not God search it out ?
 Does he not know the secrets of the heart ?—
 Nay but for thy sake are we slain ;
 And counted as sheep for the slaughter.
 Awake ! why sleepest thou, O Lord !
 Arise ! and cast not off for ever !
 Why hidest thou thy face,
 And forgettest our misery and oppression ?
 For our soul is bowed down to the dust ;
 Our body cleaves to the ground.
 Stand up and help us !
 Redeem us for thy mercy's sake !

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HOPE OF THE OPPRESSED BELIEVERS.

DANIEL I.—VII. ; PSALM CXVIII.

“ **A**LL that could make us think of thee has vanished out
 of our sight, and there is no prophet left amongst us,
 nor anyone who can foretell how long it yet shall last.” So
 cried a psalmist in the period of humiliation,¹ and we may
 well believe that many a devout sufferer, as he compared
 this season of oppression with the days of the Assyrians and
 Chaldeans, was painfully impressed by the great change that
 had taken place. In those days there were so many prophets
 to exhort and comfort the people ; now there was not one.
 No prophets had arisen for a long time back, and though no
 one could explain the reason, yet an instinctive fear was felt
 that none would come in future. And so it was. The days
 of prophecy were over in Israel. Where the written word is

¹ Psalm lxxiv. 9.

supreme the men of the spirit cannot live. And yet encouragement and consoling predictions were so sorely needed that some means must be found of meeting the want; and if it was impossible for a pious Jew of the second century B.C. to imagine, as men had done in former times, that God had chosen him as the vehicle of his direct revelations and announced to him beforehand all that he was about to do, yet at least he might partially supply the place of the living revelation and partially perform its functions by dint of studying, in faith, the words of the ancient men of God.

We can now understand the origin of the book of Daniel. A punctilious, rigidly orthodox, and firmly believing Jew had been pondering prayerfully over the sufferings of his age, and had opened the prophecies of Jeremiah.¹ There he read that Israel and many other peoples should serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. Had the prediction been fulfilled? The writer of Chronicles had boldly declared that it had, and had noted Zerubbabel's return as the end of these ten sabbatical years.² But everyone did not agree with him, at any rate in regarding this event as the complete fulfilment of the prophecy. Three centuries ago the prophet Zechariah, years after the return, had imagined when he saw the misery of his people that Yahweh's wrath was still heavy upon Israel, and that the seventy years were not yet over.³ Were they over even now? If so, where was the Messianic age that was to have dawned directly after the seventy years? Israel was still in suffering and almost in exile. The faithful were still waiting for Yahweh as one waits for the morning, for it was still night—darker night than ever, since Antiochus had come. Then it followed either that the prophet's word was false or that the seventy years were not yet over;

¹ Jeremiah xxv. 11, 12, xxix. 10.

² 2 Chronicles xxxvi. 21. Compare Ezra i. 1.

³ Zechariah i. 12.

and inasmuch as it was impossible that the word of God should not be fulfilled, the other alternative must be adopted. But several centuries had already elapsed since the prophecy of the seventy years was uttered; it followed therefore of necessity that it could not have been intended literally. It was evident from the result. Jeremiah meant seventy periods of seven years each, and they were now nearly over. The arrogance of Antiochus was the last convulsion of heathenism; full soon would he fall, and the kingdom of God begin. Such was the comfort which our author offered to his fellow believers under their oppression.

As the vehicle of his predictions he brings upon the stage an Israelite of the Captivity named Daniel, who was celebrated for his gifts as a seer.¹ He depicts him as a rigid Jew, after the type of a believer of the second century B.C., and makes him foretell the future in a variety of ways.

The first chapters of the book contain stories which may have been partially taken from popular traditions concerning Daniel; but in that case the author gave them the colouring he desired, and made them vehicles of the lesson that God delivers his pious servants and brings tyrants to their fall.

We are transplanted then to Babylon, where Nebuchadnezzar, we are told, after taking Jerusalem and carrying away Jehoiakim a captive, determined to train certain Jewish boys of noble blood as his pages. This involved, amongst other things, feeding them upon rich dainties, in order to improve their appearance. But Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who were amongst those chosen, refused to touch these dainties, because they were not prepared according to the Jewish law. The ruler of the harem, who had charge of them, was afraid of their growing thin if they lived upon potherbs and water, as they desired; but a trial of ten days convinced him of his mistake, for

¹ Ezekiel xiv. 14, 20, xxviii. 3.

they looked far better than their companions. God had blessed their simple food, and had given all of them great knowledge, and Daniel wonderful gifts as a seer ; so that these four knew ten times as much as all the astrologers and sages of the kingdom together.

Nebuchadnezzar was soon to have a proof of Daniel's gifts. For one night he started from his sleep disturbed by a dreadful dream, but he had quite forgotten what it was. Accordingly he asked his astrologers to tell him what it was he had seen in his dream ; and when they told him that was impossible, he ordered them all to be put to death. Daniel and his companions were taken with the rest to undergo the sentence, but Daniel, trusting in the help of his god, begged for a little delay, and promised the king to tell him all he desired to know. And that night God did indeed reveal it to him in a vision, so he begged that the execution of the sages might not be proceeded with since he could satisfy the king. He was ushered into the royal presence, and declared that God had revealed the secrets of the future to Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, and had now once more revealed to him, his servant, what the king had forgotten. He had seen a great statue of terrible form. The head was of fine gold, the breast and arms of silver, the body and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet of iron mixed with clay. Then a stone came down, which was not thrown by a human hand, and it crushed all the image till it was swept away by the wind, while the stone itself became a mountain that filled the whole earth. Such was the dream, and this was its meaning : The golden head was Nebuchadnezzar himself. After him another kingdom would rise, weaker than his, represented by the silver part. Then would come another, represented by the brass, that would extend over all the earth. Finally, there would be a fourth, hard and grinding like iron, and yet partly brittle, which was typified in the mingled metal and

clay. The stone was the kingdom of God, which would destroy all other kingdoms and would endure for ever itself.—When Nebuchadnezzar heard this he bowed down and acknowledged Daniel's insight, for he had faithfully described his dream. He now desired to make him governor of the district of Babylon and chief of the seers, but Daniel begged that these high positions might be given to his friends, and he himself continued to reside in the palace.

Now Nebuchadnezzar was a tyrant. He showed it more particularly on the occasion of his setting up a golden statue, sixty cubits high and six cubits broad, in the vale of Dura, in the district of Babylonia. He had a great feast for the consecration of this statue, and invited all the governors of the provinces and all the grandees of the kingdom to the ceremony. As soon as his guests were assembled, he proclaimed that, when the music gave the signal, they were all to fall down and worship the image on pain of being hurled into a burning furnace. Now, when Daniel's three friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as they were called in Chaldee—refused to obey the decree, they were sentenced to the punishment, and, when they persisted in their refusal, the furnace was made seven times as hot as usual, so that the strongest men in the army were killed by the heat as they threw the prisoners in, bound hand and foot. But behold! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remained unhurt. The fire simply burned the ropes that bound them, so that they could walk about freely in the furnace, where an angel was seen with them. When they came out they did not even smell of fire! Upon this the king was inspired with terror for their mighty god, and forbade any of his subjects, on pain of death, to speak injuriously of him.

Once again, the king had a proof of Daniel's skill as a seer, which served at the same time as a warning against his own boundless arrogance. He saw in a dream a tree, as

high as heaven, standing in the middle of the earth, with beautiful foliage and rich fruits. The beasts of the field found shelter under it, and the birds nestled in its branches. But lo! a holy angel came down from heaven and ordered this tree to be stripped of its branches and foliage and fruit, so that nothing but the naked stem was left, held to the ground by bands of metal. Then it had to share the fate of the beasts, "its human heart must become the heart of a beast" for seven years. In vain did the magicians rack their brains to explain this dream. At last it was submitted to Daniel with a request that he would expound it, but he was so utterly dismayed that, for a whole hour, he could not utter a word. When forced to speak, at last, he began with a formula for averting a curse, "My lord! may this dream be fulfilled on your enemies, and its explanation on them that oppose you!" And in truth there was a fearful meaning in the vision! This tree was the king himself, and what he saw happening to it was a foreshadowing of the fact that he would be cast out and treated like a beast. What Daniel thus predicted afterwards took place. A year thence, as Nebuchadnezzar was looking down from the battlements of his palace upon his capital, he boastfully exclaimed, "This is the great Babylon, that I have built by my power and to my glory!" and then there came a voice from heaven that pronounced his sentence. His dominion was to be taken from him, and seven years long he was to eat grass like an ox! His fate came upon him instantly; but in seven years his understanding returned and his royal splendour with it. He was at once restored to the throne, and now he gave the glory to God, who is able to humble the proud. He communicated all this to his subjects by solemn edict.

Nebuchadnezzar's son, Belshazzar, was still worse than his father, and under him the kingdom fell. This was foretold him in the following manner, on the very night on

which he lost his crown. He was holding a feast with the thousand nobles of his kingdom, and in a drunken freak he ordered the gold and silver cups and bowls, goblets and chargers, which his father had taken from the temple at Jerusalem, to be brought for himself and his courtiers, his wives and his mistresses to drink from. As they were drinking, and O horror! were praising their idols with the sacred vessels in their hands, human fingers suddenly appeared out of the wall, and wrote certain letters upon it. The king, in consternation, summoned all the astrologers, and promised to promote the man who could read and explain the writing to the third position in the whole kingdom. All the seers hurried to the place, but not one of them could decipher the writing. The whole assembly was filled with dismay, and Belshazzar and his nobles had sat down pale with terror when the queen entered the festive hall and told the king that there was a certain Daniel amongst his subjects whom his father had made the head of the seers. The king immediately sent for him, and besought him urgently to decipher the writing, promising to make him the third in the kingdom. "Keep your gifts, O king," he answered, "I ask no reward for telling you what you desire. Remember what befell your father, and how his pride was humbled! And yet you have not humbled yourself, but have desecrated the holy vessels of God's temple. And this is why that portion of his hand came out against you. Do you ask what is written there? It is *mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*, which means: Numbered, numbered, weighed, divided. God has numbered the days of your kingdom, and they are over; has weighed it, and found it too light; has divided it, and given it to the Medes and Persians." Then Daniel was clad in a purple robe and adorned with a golden necklace, and proclaimed the third in the kingdom. But that very night Belshazzar was slain.

Under his successor, Darius the Mede, Daniel was at first high in honour. He was the chief of the three viceroys to whom the governors of the hundred and twenty provinces were responsible, and the king was even thinking of making him viceroy of the whole kingdom. The nobles and governors, who were all hostile to him, endeavoured in vain to compass his ruin; for they could not accuse him of the least impropriety. Then they saw that there was but one way to trip him up. They must manage to make his fidelity to his own religion appear an offence. So they all advised the king to make a proclamation that for thirty days no one should ask anything of god or man, except of him, the king. Accordingly the king issued the decree, and, like all the laws of the Persians and Medes, it was irrevocable. But Daniel defied the edict, and went as usual to pray, three times a day, at the open window, with his face towards Jerusalem. Of course his enemies observed him, and immediately informed the king that Daniel had disobeyed his precept. Darius was deeply grieved, and did all he could to rescue his favourite; but Daniel's enemies held him to his word, and at last he was obliged to have him thrown into the lions' den, as he had said in the proclamation. "May your god, whom you worship, rescue you!" he cried to the prisoner as he was led off to the place of punishment. Then Daniel was let down into the den, the mouth of which was closed with a stone, sealed with the king's signet-ring and those of his nobles. But Darius was so depressed that he ate nothing at his evening meal, sent away the music, and could not sleep. Early in the morning, at dawn of day, he went to the lions' den, and called to Daniel in a mournful voice, "Daniel! servant of the living God! has God indeed saved you from the mouths of the lions?" Picture his joy when he heard the answer, "He has, O king! Live for ever! My God sent an angel to deliver me, for I have committed no offence

against you." Then the king ordered him to be drawn up out of the den, and all those who had accused him, together with their wives and children, to be thrown in. Of course, they no sooner touched the ground than the lions fell upon them and devoured them. Then the king issued orders to all his subjects to worship the god of Daniel, for he was the living and only God; and, as long as Darius lived, Daniel prospered.

Let us pause for a moment at this point to consider what we have read. We have had our fill of wonders, and of scenes which are impossibility itself. Moreover, we have had a most erroneous representation of the course of history. It is true that a prince of the name of Belshazzar did perish at the taking of Babylon, but he was a son of Nabonedus, the last Chaldean monarch, and not of Nebuchadrezzar. And again, it was not Darius the Mede, but Cyrus that took Babylon; nor did any kingdom of the Medes at all intervene between that of the Chaldees and that of the Persians. The writer appears to have confounded the taking of Babylon by Cyrus with its subsequent capture by Darius Hystaspis, one of his successors. But he really did believe a kingdom of the Medes to have succeeded that of Nebuchadrezzar, for he represents it by the silver breast and arms, under the golden head of the statue seen by the king in his dream, while the brass signifies the kingdom of the Persians, the iron that of Alexander, the stern ruler who crushed everything beneath him, and the mixture of iron and clay in the feet of the image indicates the weak points in the divided kingdom of this mighty conqueror.

All hesitation in believing that the writer's knowledge of history was so exceedingly defective as this vanishes when we find him elsewhere¹ distinctly implying that there were only

¹ Daniel xi. 2-4.

four Persian kings, whereas we know of no less than twelve. And again, he made a grave mistake as to the length of the period he was reviewing. He calculates that there were seventy times seven years between Jeremiah's prophecy and the fall of Antiochus, which he expected within a few years. But the period between the date of Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years (605 B.C.) and the year when our book was written (165 B.C.) falls short of the required time by fifty years. But if the writer himself had no means of gaining a more accurate knowledge of history, none of his readers were any better off. Besides, he was doubtless too full of his own purpose to trouble himself much as to these matters. His sole object in telling these stories was to fire his dejected fellow believers with courage to persevere. They must not let themselves be driven to eat forbidden food, to worship idols, or to neglect their daily prayers and all that the Law prescribed. Their God was the God of heaven, mightier than all gods and kings, fully able to rescue his worshippers from the most threatening dangers. He humbled the proud. Did this overweening Antiochus dare to persecute the faithful? He himself should be compelled by the visible help which God would bring to his servants to acknowledge his folly in resisting Him. And if he would not yield, if he thought it was his own might that had made him so great, he might see his lot foreshadowed in that of Nebuchadnezzar, whom God as good as made into a beast for a time on purpose to humble him; or he might read in Belshazzar's fate what was coming upon him too, for that *Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin* was equally applicable to his own dominion!

Meanwhile our author was not content with this general announcement that the end was near, and that the kingdom of God, the stone thrown without human hand, would supersede the kingdoms of the world. He desired to indicate the

course of events from Daniel's time to his own more in detail, and also to describe the future more exactly. To this object the remainder of the book, which records certain visions of Daniel's, is devoted.

One of these visions, that of the ram beaten by the goat, we have already considered,¹ with the exception of a single detail, namely, the prediction that the daily sacrifice, to which Antiochus had put a stop, would be suspended for exactly two thousand three hundred mornings and evenings, or three and a half years;² for the writer establishes certain resting points in the period of the seventy weeks of years. In the first place, when seven of them were gone, the anointed, the prince, should cause Jerusalem to be rebuilt. This must be a reference either to Cyrus or to the high priest Joshua, under whom the first band of exiles returned. After sixty-two more weeks of years another anointed should be slain. This may be an allusion to the high priest Onias III., who was overtaken by this fate. Half a week of years after that, the daily sacrifice should be suspended, and in three and a half years more Antiochus should fall and the kingdom of God should come.³ The author further describes the history of Syria and Egypt, after the partition of Alexander's kingdom, in some detail.⁴

There is little to attract us in all the allusions and obscure indications of recent events which our author lays on the lips of the ancient seer. He always selects an enigmatical form of utterance suitable to oracular deliverances; but there is one section of his book in particular which has always made a profound impression upon its readers, and has given rise to much deep speculation and to much idle waste of words. It is the vision of the four beasts.⁵

I saw storms, says our author, in his character of Daniel,

¹ See p. 273.

² Daniel viii. 13, 14.

³ Daniel ix. 24—27. Compare xii. 7, 11.

⁴ Daniel xi.

⁵ Daniel vii.

bursting from every quarter of heaven, as four monsters came up out of the sea. The first was like a lion, with eagle's wings; and behold! it was robbed of its feathers, and stood up on its hind legs and received a human heart. Then there came up a second, like a bear, leaning towards one side, with three ribs in its mouth; and a voice said, "Rise up and eat much flesh!" Then a third came into view, like a leopard, with four wings; and it had four heads, and was very mighty. But terrible as these three were, the fourth was monstrous above them all. A terrific creature! With great iron teeth it crunched and devoured all it could lay hold of, and trod the rest under foot. It had ten horns upon its head; and behold! there came up a little horn amongst the rest, three of which were plucked out to make room for it, and this little horn had human eyes, and a mouth with which it spoke boastfully. And lo! there were thrones made ready, and the Ancient of Days, even God, sat down in a shining garment, with snow-white hair on his head. The throne glittered, and its wheels were all aglow. A river of fire streamed out from Him, and millions of angels stood before Him. Then the judgment began, and the books were opened. Upon this the fourth beast was sentenced, slain, and burned, because of all the blasphemous language of the little horn. Meanwhile the other beasts were also bereft of their power, for it was but given them for a time. And when all this was accomplished, there came one upon the clouds like a son of man, and he was taken before the throne of God, where honour and dominion were given him to all eternity.

Then, continues Daniel, I was filled with consternation at this vision, and I asked one of the angels to explain it, especially the meaning of the little horn. And he answered that it was a king who would rise up against God, persecute the holy people, abolish the Law, and rule for a time, two

times and half a time (three and a half years), but would then perish, and give place to the kingdom of the saints, which should endure for ever.

It is as clear as daylight to every impartial investigator that this little horn is Antiochus Epiphanes, and that the fourth beast must therefore be the Greek empire. But it is easy to see why ancient and modern interpreters have been unwilling to recognise the fact; for Daniel very definitely predicts that on the fall of the fourth beast the kingdom of God will come. Moreover this "son of man" was supposed to be Jesus. And therefore, as long as the book of Daniel was regarded as a genuine unveiling of the future for the benefit of posterity, people had to explain the fourth beast as the Roman empire, or some still later power. But the truth is that our author knew very little of the period in which he supposed Daniel to live, that his information, very naturally, became more adequate as he approached his own day (165 B.C.), and that he could no more foresee what would take place afterwards than anyone of us can foretell the future. As for the vision of the son of man, it doubtless exercised great influence upon the expectations entertained both by Jesus himself and by his Apostles;¹ but it is equally certain that the writer himself did not intend the "son of man" to represent the Messiah. He symbolised the kingdom of the saints, the redeemed and purified Israel, under this type, just as he had represented the heathen kingdoms under the forms of beasts.²

If we are content not to ascribe to the writer a knowledge of the future which he never possessed, but to take his vision for what it really was, that is to say, for his individual conception of the course of history, then we find in it the fruits of a strong faith and of truly ennobling ideas. One kingdom had succeeded another in Asia, and had counted the holy land

¹ Compare Vol. V., pp. 402, 403.

² Daniel vii. 18, 27.

amongst its provinces. There was first the dominion of the great Nebuchadrezzar ; then the tottering power of the Medes ; then, again, the mighty and swift-spreading Persian monarchy. To this lion with a human heart, to this bear that stood askew, to this winged panther, power had been given for a time, and they had ruled successively even over the saints. But the kingdom of the Greeks, with all its monarchs great and small, was beyond comparison the most abominable ; while Antiochus, the persecutor of the Jews, was great and terrible beyond all others. But let not Israel fear ! There is One who rules over all things, from whom the former kingdoms drew all the strength they had, and that is God. Soon will He call the reckless monarch to his bar and pronounce his sentence, at the same time humbling all the heathen powers. Then will come another kingdom—not out of the sea, but from heaven ; not in the form of a monster, but in the noble form of man—the kingdom of God's people, which will abide for ever. Then shall the dead also—this is the first distinct indication of the belief among the Jews—then shall the dead awake, these to everlasting life, and those to shame ; and the teachers, who have shown the way of righteousness to so many, shall shine forth like the sun. Blessed is he who endures to the end !¹

With regard to the source from which he drew his conceptions of the future, the writer of the book of Daniel stands in sharp contrast to the ancient prophets. It is no inspiration, no direct revelation from the deity, that urges him to speak. He simply records what he has learned from studying and unravelling the written word. But the essence of his faith is identical with theirs. His soul, like theirs, is filled with the sublime conviction that every event on earth depends upon the God of heaven, who has chosen Israel as the people of his grace.

¹ Daniel xii.

We may well believe that such a book as this helped to encourage the faithful, and to fire them with zeal to persevere under their sufferings and in their conflict. When it was written Mattathias and his sons had probably raised the banner of revolt already, for we read of "a little help which shall support the teachers."¹ Full soon the war of liberty would spread, and Antiochus would learn what a small people can do when it fights for its hearths and its altar. His rule over Judæa would come to an end, not by a stone thrown without human hand, but by the heroism of Jewish faith. It was not long before Judas the Maccabee took Jerusalem, and then, though the citadel was still in the hands of the Syrians, the sanctuary was once more cleansed, and a new altar reared in place of the one polluted by idolatry. In December, 164 B.C., just three years after the introduction of the worship of Jupiter, the temple was restored to Israel's god.

Then might have been sung a song which was possibly composed for this very occasion :²

Give thanks unto Yahweh, for he is good ;

His mercy endures for ever !

In my distress I called upon Yahweh,

And he heard my prayer and enlarged my place.

Yahweh is with me ; I will not fear ;

For what can man do against me ?

It is better to trust in Yahweh than men,

Better in Yahweh than princes.

All the heathens had surrounded me,

But in Yahweh's name have I shattered them all.

Shouts of rejoicing are in the tents of the righteous ;

Yahweh's right hand puts forth its might.

Open me the gates of salvation,

That I may go in and sing praises to Yahweh.

¹ Daniel xi. 33, 34.

² Psalm cxviii.

This is the gate of Yahweh
By which the righteous enter.
A stone rejected by the builders
Has become the great corner stone.
Behold ! it is Yahweh's doing ;
It is marvellous in our eyes.
This is the day that Yahweh has made,
Let us rejoice and exult !
O Yahweh, help us !
O Yahweh, deliver us !
Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh !
We greet thee from Yahweh's house.
God Yahweh gives us light ;
Bind the festive offering with cords to the altar.
Thou art my God, I will praise thee !
My God, I will sing thy glory !
Praise Yahweh, for he is good,
For his grace endures for ever.

Thus did Israel rejoice when his deliverance began, regarding himself as the corner stone of the kingdom of God. And, in truth, he had been too much despised by the builders of the kingdoms of the world ! Now he had made his power felt, and could henceforth celebrate his deliverance from year to year in the "feast of the renewing of the temple," or "feast of lights." But the kingdom of God was not to come with outward splendour ; and when he came who laid, by moral force, the foundations of a spiritual religion, Israel shut himself out. Even the political independence secured for a time would soon pass away, and Israel would sink into slavery once more ; and at last, after a hopeless struggle, would be broken up and scattered amongst the nations.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

HERE the expounder of the Old Testament lays down his pen, but only to take it up again presently. He owes his readers a word of explanation on both these points! We promised to examine the Bible, and with regard to the Old Testament we have now redeemed our pledge. We have dealt with all the Biblical narratives and the most important sections of the prophecies, the proverbs, and the other poetical books. But we have from the first kept another object equally clearly in view, and that has been to describe the development of the religion of Israel as accurately as possible, in connection with the several portions of the Bible. Down to the time of Nehemiah we have not neglected this second object, but have drawn together all the materials which we thought would throw light upon the history of Israel's religion. For the period between Nehemiah and the Maccabees we have not done so. We have indeed taken a rapid survey of the history, and set the various books which were written in this period in their historical framework, but we have omitted much that might have filled in and thrown light upon the picture. For instance, we have not mentioned the founding of the temple on Mount Gerizim, the first steps made by the scribes towards the formation of the canon or collection of the sacred books, the important work of Jesus ben Sirach, which was composed before the book of Daniel, the chasm that gradually opened between the priests and the scribes, the contests for the office of high priest, or the rise of the schools of Pharisees and Sadducees.

The reason is that the books of the Bible are not the main sources of our information on these subjects, and we should exceed the limits we have assigned ourselves far too

much were we to examine with the requisite care all that we can collect from other sources to throw light upon this period.

Moreover, if we had done all that lay in our power accurately to describe the period between Nehemiah and the Maccabees, we should still have left both ourselves and our readers quite unsatisfied; for when we reach the Maccabæan revolt, we are still separated by nearly two centuries from the date of the ministry of Jesus, so that the connection between the Old and New Testaments is not yet by any means established. It is not only that we are interested in the external history of the Jews during this interval, and that we should like to know, for instance, how Palestine fell into the hands of the Romans, and how the Herods came to the throne, but these two centuries are exceedingly important with reference to the internal history of the people. This is no more than we should expect, for at the beginning of the period in question the Jewish religion was anything but petrified. There was religious life, and strong life too, in the country; and wherever there is life there is movement, there is conflict, there is alternate progress and retrogression, and all that gives interest to history. And accordingly the religious history of these two centuries is full of interest. Numbers of books were written, for instance. The writer of Daniel had many followers who produced *apocalypses* or "revelations," as they are commonly called, - like his. The "Proverbs of Jesus ben Sirach" did not close the series of worthy successors of the ancient sages, amongst whom the author of the Book of Wisdom deserves our special attention. Such an historian as the author of the first book of Maccabees surely does not deserve to be neglected; and songs such as the psalms of Solomon were still composed, which, though excluded from the canon, interpret the sufferings and the faith of the believers just as truly as the psalms in the Bible. The

composition of fictitious stories for purposes of edification did not stop with Esther and Daniel, as is shown by the second and still more by the third book of Maccabees, by Judith and Tobit. Some of these works are accepted by a great portion of the Christian Church as sacred writings of the second rank under the name of apocryphal books, others have been almost completely overlooked, and some few, such as the book of Enoch, have only recently been discovered and explained.

All this well deserves our attention, both on its own account and as a help to the comprehension of the time of Jesus. But we must not stop even here, for Judaism retained its independent existence after the time of Jesus. It was not till the year 70 A.D. that Jerusalem was taken and laid waste by Titus, and even that did not quench the Jewish spirit of independence or annihilate the Jewish people as such. This consummation was still deferred for full sixty years. And again, in and after the time of Jesus the great rabbis rose who laid the foundations of the Talmud, that colossal monument of Jewish hair-splitting in the interpretation and application of the Law! All this and much more besides falls largely within the New Testament period, but it lies so completely beyond the horizon of the Evangelists and Apostles that it can hardly be touched upon in connection with their work, though it fully deserves our careful consideration.

For these reasons we have determined to deal with the first six centuries of Judaism from the time of Nehemiah to the last revolt against the Romans, under Barcochba, in a separate work. We shall there content ourselves in the period before the Maccabees with simply supplementing what has been said in the present volume, and shall then go on with the history of the following centuries in the same style we have adopted in this first part of "The Bible for Young People." We hope that the work on the "Old Testament"

we have now concluded, together with the sequel, will furnish an adequate picture of ancient Israel, that remarkable people to whom mankind owes greater treasures than to any other nation, ancient or modern.¹

¹ NOTE.—*Dr. Oort has already partially redeemed this promise by the issue of the first of two small volumes on "The Last Centuries of Jewish National Existence." The English translator and publishers are not in a position at present to give any pledge with regard to this supplementary work.* TB.

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